Eastern Sierra Council of Governments (ESCOG)
Joint Powers Authority Agenda

Friday, February 4, 2022, 1:00 p.m.

437 Old Mammoth Road, Suite Z, Mammoth Lakes

Members of the Board

City of Bishop Councilmember Karen Schwartz - Chair,
Town of Mammoth Lakes Councilmember John Wentworth - Vice Chair,
Mono County Supervisor Stacy Corless, Mono County Supervisor Bob Gardner,
Inyo County Supervisor Jeff Griffiths, Inyo County Supervisor Dan Totheroh,
City of Bishop Councilmember Jim Ellis, Town of Mammoth Lakes Councilmember Lynda Salcido

NOTE: In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, if you need special assistance to participate in this meeting, please contact the Assistant Clerk at (760) 965-3615. Notification 48 hours prior to the meeting will enable the Town to make reasonable arrangements to ensure accessibility to this meeting. (28 CFR 13.102-35.104 ADA Title II)

NOTE: Materials related to an item on this agenda submitted after distribution of the agenda packet are available for public inspection in the Town Offices located at 437 Old Mammoth Road, Suite 230 during normal business hours. Such documents are also available on the ESCOG website at www.escog.ca.gov subject to staff's ability to post the documents before the meeting.

NOTE: This will be a Zoom meeting and will be conducted pursuant to the provisions of Assembly Bill 361 (AB 361) which amends certain requirements of the Ralph M. Brown Act. It is strongly encouraged that you watch this meeting on the Town of Mammoth Lakes' (TOML) website at www.townofmammothlakes.ca.gov , via Zoom or on TOML's local government cable channel 18. Public comments may be submitted to the ESCOG Clerk at clerk@townofmammothlakes.ca.gov before and during the meeting or may be made via Zoom or in person.

<u>ZOOM INFORMATION</u>
 Join from a PC, Mac, iPad, iPhone or Android device:
Please click this URL to join. https://monocounty.zoom.us/s/92421427651
Or join by phone:
Dial (for higher quality, dial a number based on your current location):
US: +1 669 900 6833 or +1 346 248 7799 or +1 253 215 8782 or +1 646 876 9923 or +1 301 715 8592 or +1 312 626 6799 ***To raise your hand press *9, To Unmute/Mute press *6**
Webinar ID: 924 2142 7651
International numbers available: https://monocounty.zoom.us/u/achYvzWR9t

1.   CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

2.   PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

3.   PUBLIC COMMENTS

Notice to the Public: This time is set aside to receive public comment on matters not calendared on the agenda. When recognized by the Chair, please state your name and address for the record and please limit your comments to three minutes. Under California law the Eastern Sierra Council of Governments Board is prohibited from generally discussing or taking action on items not included in the agenda; however, the Eastern Sierra Council of Governments Board may briefly respond to comments or questions from members of the public. Therefore, the Eastern Sierra Council of Governments Board will listen to all public comment but will not generally discuss the matter or take action on it.

4.   CONSENT AGENDA

4.1.   Approve the minutes of the Regular Meeting of December 10, 2021

4.2.   Approve the minutes of the Regular Meeting of January 7, 2022

4.3.   Consideration of a Resolution of the Board of Directors of the Eastern Sierra Council of Governments Regarding the Need for Continued Virtual Meetings to Protect Public Health

4.4.   Ratify Letter Regarding Providing Comments on the Community Economic Resiliency Fund Sent January 28, 2022

5.   POLICY MATTERS

5.1.   Receive a Presentation from Tim Golden, Bishop Climbers Coalition

5.2.   Call for Selection of Chair and Vice Chair

5.3.   Discussion and Adoption of Increase in Budget Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2021-2022

5.4.   Discussion and Direction Regarding Visitor Connection Package Funding

5.5.   Discussion and Direction Regarding ESCOG Strategic Meeting with County and City Administrators

5.6.   Consideration of a Request for Proposals for the Eastern Sierra Pace and Scale Accelerator Project for Environmental Planning Services

5.7.   Discussion and Direction to Staff to Apply for Capacity Funding through the USDA Strategic Economic and Community Development Program

5.8.   Discussion and Direction Regarding the Citizens Wildfire Task Force

5.9.   Receive an Update on Sustainable Recreation and Ecosystem Management Program Activities

6.   **BOARD MEMBER/AGENCY REPORTS**
       Informational reports from Member Agency representatives on committees, commissions, and organizations; general reports on Board Member activities

7.   **REQUEST FOR FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

8.   **ADJOURNMENT**
       The ESCOG will adjourn to the next regular meeting scheduled to be held on April 8, 2022.

Eastern Sierra Council of Governments (ESCOG) - Joint Powers Authority (JPA)

Minutes of Regular Meeting

December 10, 2021, 8:30 a.m.
437 Old Mammoth Road, Suite Z, Mammoth Lakes

Members Present: Chair Karen Schwartz, Vice Chair John Wentworth, Board
Member Stacy Corless, Board Member Bob Gardner, Board
Member Jeff Griffiths, Board Member Dan Totheroh, Board
Member Jim Ellis, Board Member Lynda Salcido

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1. **CALL TO ORDER**

   Chair Karen Schwartz called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. in the Council
   Chamber, 437 Old Mammoth Road, Mammoth Lakes. The members of the Board
   attended the meeting via videoconference.

2. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

   Chair Karen Schwartz led the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

   Board Member Lynda Salcido said that she would need to temporarily leave the
   meeting at 9:00 a.m.

4. **CONSENT AGENDA**

   Moved by Board Member Stacy Corless
   Seconded by Board Member Bob Gardner

   Approve the Consent Agenda.

   For (8): Chair Karen Schwartz, Vice Chair John Wentworth, Board Member Stacy
   Corless, Board Member Bob Gardner, Board Member Jeff Griffiths, Board
   Member Dan Totheroh, Board Member Jim Ellis, and Board Member Lynda
   Salcido

   Carried (8 to 0)

4.1 **Approve the minutes of the Regular Meeting of October 8, 2021**

4.2 **Approve the minutes of the Special Meeting of November 5, 2021**

4.3 **Approve the minutes of the Special Meeting of December 3, 2021**

4.4 **Consideration of A Resolution of the Board of Directors of the Eastern Sierra Council of Governments Regarding the Need for Continued Virtual Meetings to Protect Public Health**

5. **POLICY MATTERS**

5.1 **Receive a Presentation from the Inyo County County Administrator's Office regarding preparation of a regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)**

Executive Director Elaine Kabala explained what a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) was and spoke about the possibility of creating a regional CEDS. Ms. Kabala introduced County of Inyo Assistant County Administrator Meaghan McCamman.

Ms. McCamman spoke about potential funding for a regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and asked the Board for their thoughts with regard to moving forward with a CEDS.

SPEAKING FROM THE FLOOR:

Town of Mammoth Lakes (TOML) Town Manager Dan Holler spoke in favor of a regional CEDS and discussed funding and matching requirements, in addition to leadership and staffing requirements. Mr. Holler reported that there would be a CEDS presentation next week at the TOML Town Council meeting and said that the idea had been presented at the TOML Planning and Economic Development Commission meeting earlier this week.

County of Inyo County Administrative Officer Leslie Chapman said that the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC) had been working on funding for regional CEDS in areas that did not currently have one in place. Ms. Chapman asked the Board if they supported the idea of a regional CEDS and if they were willing to go back to their member agencies to request approval for them to assist with the matching funds so they could move forward.

Legal Counsel Grace Chuchla spoke about the legal impact to the ESCOG and gave input regarding the procedures for each of the member agencies.

RCRC Deputy Chief Economic Development Officer Bob Burris spoke in favor of a regional CEDS and said that the RCRC had launched an effort to provide resources to create CEDS. Mr. Burris said that the RCRC had applied for a U.S Economic Development Administration (EDA) grant to support member counties with rural broadband and to ensure their member counties had CEDS. He said Inyo County had agreed to apply for an EDA grant and that he had not realized at the time that Mono County did not have a CEDS, however, he was told by the EDA that it would be possible to amend the Inyo application to add Mono and Alpine Counties if they were interested. Mr. Burris said that a Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) would be available to start a project that could be reimbursed at a later date and said that consultants were available to assist with research to complete the CEDS.

City of Bishop City Administrator Ron Phillips reported that Bishop was considering applying for an EDA grant and said the Regional EDA Representative had recently approved their Economic Development General Plan as their CEDS for one year, which would allow them to apply within the next year, however, they would need the regional CEDS to apply in the future.

There was discussion between Ms. Kabala, Mr. Holler, Ms. Chapman, Mr. Burris, Mr. Philips and members of the Board.

Board Member Lynda Salcido left the meeting at 8:59 a.m.

5.2 **Consideration of an Agreement with the Rural County Representatives of California Revolving Loan Fund in the Amount of $500,000**

Executive Director Elaine Kabala outlined the information in the staff report.

Rural County Representatives of California Deputy Chief Economic Development Officer Bob Burris provided additional details about the RCRC's Golden State Finance Authority (GSFA) Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) program.

Mono County Director of Finance Janet Dutcher spoke about the financial structure of the program, discussed how the ESCOG's account was currently set up, and discussed options to keep the account from going negative while waiting for reimbursement to come in from the RLF.

There was discussion between Ms. Kabala, Mr. Burris, Ms. Dutcher and members of the Board.

Moved by Board Member Jeff Griffiths
Seconded by Vice Chair John Wentworth

Approve the Memorandum of Understanding between the Golden State Finance Authority (GSFA) and the Eastern Sierra Council of Governments (ESCOG) regarding an Advancement of Funds for Public Purposes.

For (7): Chair Karen Schwartz, Vice Chair John Wentworth, Board Member Stacy Corless, Board Member Bob Gardner, Board Member Jeff Griffiths, Board Member Dan Totheroh, and Board Member Jim Ellis

Absent (1): Board Member Lynda Salcido

Carried (7 to 0)

5.3 **Consideration of a Collection Agreement Between the Eastern Sierra Council of Governments and the United States Department of Agriculture U.S. Forest Service Inyo National Forest**

Executive Director Elaine Kabala outlined the information in the staff report.

There was discussion between Ms. Kabala and members of the Board.

Moved by Board Member Stacy Corless
Seconded by Vice Chair John Wentworth

Approve the Collection Agreement between the Eastern Sierra Council of Governments and the United States Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service Inyo National Forest.

For (7): Chair Karen Schwartz, Vice Chair John Wentworth, Board Member Stacy Corless, Board Member Bob Gardner, Board Member Jeff Griffiths, Board Member Dan Totheroh, and Board Member Jim Ellis

Absent (1): Board Member Lynda Salcido

Carried (7 to 0)

5.4 **Consideration and Direction Regarding Proposal(s) received in response to the Eastern Sierra Pace and Scale Accelerator Project Management Request for Proposals**

Executive Director Elaine Kabala outlined the information in the staff report.

There was discussion between Ms. Kabala and members of the Board.

Moved by Board Member Jeff Griffiths
Seconded by Vice Chair John Wentworth

Approve execution of a Professional Services Agreement with the Whitebark Institute as presented.

For (7): Chair Karen Schwartz, Vice Chair John Wentworth, Board Member Stacy Corless, Board Member Bob Gardner, Board Member Jeff Griffiths, Board Member Dan Totheroh, and Board Member Jim Ellis

Absent (1): Board Member Lynda Salcido

Carried (7 to 0)

5.5 **Discussion and direction to submit a Notice of Interest for the California Hazard Mitigation Program Funding Opportunity**

Executive Director Elaine Kabala outlined the information in the staff report.

Inyo-Mono Integrated Regional Water Management Program (IRWMP) Project Development Specialist Rick Kattelmann spoke about the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) California Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) and the importance of the grant to our region.

There was discussion between Ms. Kabala, Mr. Kattelmann and members of the Board.

Moved by Board Member Stacy Corless
Seconded by Vice Chair John Wentworth

Approve submission of Notice of Interest for the California Hazard Mitigation Program Funding Opportunity.

For (7): Chair Karen Schwartz, Vice Chair John Wentworth, Board Member Stacy Corless, Board Member Bob Gardner, Board Member Jeff Griffiths, Board Member Dan Totheroh, and Board Member Jim Ellis

Absent (1): Board Member Lynda Salcido

Carried (7 to 0)

5.6 Discussion and approval of 2022 ESCOG JPA Meeting Schedule

Executive Director Elaine Kabala outlined the information in the staff report.

There was discussion between Ms. Kabala and members of the Board.

Board Member Bob Gardner left the meeting at 9:53 a.m.

Moved by Board Member Bob Gardner
Seconded by Vice Chair John Wentworth

Approve the 2022 Eastern Sierra Council of Governments (ESCOG) JPA Meeting Schedule as amended to move the February meeting date and time to Friday, February 4, 2022 at 1:00 p.m.

For (7): Chair Karen Schwartz, Vice Chair John Wentworth, Board Member Stacy Corless, Board Member Bob Gardner, Board Member Jeff Griffiths, Board Member Dan Totheroh, and Board Member Jim Ellis

Absent (1): Board Member Lynda Salcido

Carried (7 to 0)

5.7 Receive an Update on the Sustainable Recreation and Tourism Initiative (SRTI)

Vice Chair John Wentworth outlined the information in the Sustainable Recreation Tourism Initiative (SRTI) PowerPoint presentation.

Board Member Lynda Salcido returned at 9:45 a.m.

There was discussion among members of the Board.

6. **BOARD MEMBER/AGENCY REPORTS**

Board Member Jeff Griffiths gave an update regarding redistricting in Inyo County and announced that County of Inyo County Counsel Marshall Rudolph had retired and Assistant County Counsel John Vallejo had been appointed as his replacement.

Mr. Griffiths reported that Inyo County would have their first presentation on the American Rescue Plan dollars on December 14th and announced that the Eastern Sierra Regional Airport (a.k.a. Bishop Airport) would welcome its first commercial flight on December 19th. He also announced that Sheriff Jeff Hollowell would retire in mid-December and that the new County office building had been formally named the Clint G. Quilter Consolidated Office Building in honor of Inyo County's late County Administrator. Mr. Griffiths reported that he attended the California State Association of Counties (CSAC) conference where he learned about the Venado Declaration which former Governor of California Jerry Brown had accelerated in an effort to protect forestlands, and said that he had been elected to the CSAC Executive Board.

Board Member Dan Totheroh announced that the Owens Valley Groundwater Association had met yesterday and approved a Groundwater Sustainability Plan which they would send to the State.

Vice Chair John Wentworth spoke about the recent, and upcoming snow in Mammoth, reported that the Town Council would meet on December 15th, and said that housing in Mammoth was moving forward.

Board Member Lynda Salcido gave an update on housing and the Community Recreation Center (CRC) and said that Mammoth was expecting more snow. Ms. Salcido said there were some big events coming up and reminded everyone to get their booster.

Board Member Stacy Corless gave an update on redistricting in Mono County, and said that there would be a decision made at the Board of Supervisors meeting on Tuesday. Ms. Corless said that the County was going through a Strategic Planning effort and hoped to complete it by early 2022. She said that she and Board Member Gardner were considering putting together a Wildfire Resilience Summit in the spring and said that she and Board Member John Wentworth had attended a tour of the Caldera Fire footprint. She said that Mono County currently had the worst COVID numbers in the state, however, the health outcomes were still good.

Board Member Jim Ellis said it was good to see the Sustainable Recreation Tourism Initiative (SRTI) come together to benefit the region. Mr. Ellis reported that the Bishop Downtown Specific Plan Review would end on Monday, said that there was an airport coming just outside of Bishop, and said that the Christmas parade last weekend was a success. He said that he was looking forward to a visit with his with daughter tomorrow for the first time in a year and meeting his new granddaughter.

There was discussion among members of the Board.

7.   REQUEST FOR FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

Vice Chair John Wentworth requested that the following items be addressed at a future meeting: Eastern Sierra Visitor Connection Package and the capacity of the ESCOG.

8.   ADJOURNMENT

There was discussion among members of the Board and Executive Director Elaine Kabala regarding the timeline of the CEDS process.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:28 a.m. to a special meeting scheduled to be held on January 7, 2022.

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  Angela Plaisted, Assistant Clerk

Eastern Sierra Council of Governments (ESCOG) - Joint Powers Authority (JPA)

Minutes of Special Meeting

January 7, 2022, 8:30 a.m.
437 Old Mammoth Road, Suite Z, Mammoth Lakes

Members Present: Vice Chair John Wentworth, Board Member Stacy Corless, Board Member Bob Gardner, Board Member Jeff Griffiths, Board Member Dan Totheroh, Board Member Jim Ellis, Board Member Lynda Salcido

Members Absent: Chair Karen Schwartz

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1.   CALL TO ORDER

Vice Chair John Wentworth called the meeting to order at 8:36 a.m. in the Council Chamber at 437 Old Mammoth Road, Suite Z Mammoth Lakes. Members of the Board attended the meeting via videoconference.

2.   PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Vice Chair John Wentworth led the Pledge of Allegiance.

3.   PUBLIC COMMENTS

An email was received from Inyo-Mono Integrated Regional Water Management Program (IRWMP) Project Development Specialist Rick Kattelmann informing the ESCOG that due to a policy update from the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) they would not be eligible to apply for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)/CalOES grant which had been discussed at their December 10, 2021 meeting.

There was discussion among members of the Board.

4.   ASSEMBLY BILL 361 (AB 361) FINDINGS

4.1   Consideration of A Resolution of the Board of Directors of the Eastern Sierra Council of Governments Regarding the Need for Continued Virtual Meetings to Protect Public Health

Executive Director Elaine Kabala outlined the information in the staff report.

There was discussion between Ms. Kabala and members of the Board.

Moved by Board Member Jeff Griffiths
Seconded by Board Member Bob Gardner

Adopt the Resolution regarding virtual meetings for the protection of public health pursuant to Assembly Bill 361 (AB 361).

For (7): Vice Chair John Wentworth, Board Member Stacy Corless, Board Member Bob Gardner, Board Member Jeff Griffiths, Board Member Dan Totheroh, Board Member Jim Ellis, and Board Member Lynda Salcido

Absent (1): Chair Karen Schwartz

Carried (7 to 0)

5.   ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:44 a.m. to the next regular meeting scheduled to be held on February 4, 2022 at 1:00 p.m.

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 Angela Plaisted, Assistant Clerk

RESOLUTION NO. 2022-____

**A RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS
OF THE EASTERN SIERRA COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS
REGARDING THE NEED FOR CONTINUED VIRTUAL MEETINGS TO
PROTECT PUBLIC HEALTH**

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to threaten the health and safety of communities within ESCOG's jurisdiction since its inception in March 2020; and

WHEREAS, Governor Newsom has declared a state of emergency related to the COVID-19 pandemic; and

WHEREAS, the Health Officers for Inyo and Mono Counties have recommended social distancing and continued virtual meetings as a means to limit the spread of COVID-19, particularly the highly contagious Delta variant. These recommendations are attached hereto as Exhibit A.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Board of Directors of ESCOG that

1. The Board has considered the circumstances of the state of emergency related to COVID-19 and declared by Governor Newsom.
2. The Board finds that the above-mentioned state of emergency directly impacts the ability of ESCOG to meet safely in person because in person meetings, particularly with the public present, increase the likelihood that COVID-19 will be transmitted throughout the community.
3. Local officials—specifically the Health Officers of Inyo and Mono Counties— continue to recommend measures to promote social distancing.

PASSED AND ADOPTED 4th day of February, 2022 by the following vote:

AYES:
NOES:
ABSTAIN:
ABSENT:

ATTEST: _____   _____
        Secretary   Karen Schwartz
                            Chairperson

MONO COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT
Public Health

To: Board of Supervisors

From: Bryan Wheeler, Director of Public Health

Re: Recommendation regarding Social Distancing and Virtual Meetings

Both Mono County "covering" Health Officer Dr. Rick Johnson and I strongly recommend that physical/social distancing measures continue to be practiced throughout our Mono County communities, including at meetings of the Board of Supervisors and other County-related legislative bodies subject to the Brown Act, to minimize the spread of COVID-19.

Whether vaccinated or not, positive individuals are contracting the Delta variant and infecting others in our communities. Social distancing and masking are crucial mitigation measure to prevent the disease's spread. Virtual board meetings allow for the participation of the community, county staff, presenters, and board members in a safe environment, with no risk of contagion. It is recommended that legislative bodies in Mono County implement fully-remote meetings to the extent possible.

If you have any questions regarding this recommendation, please do not hesitate to contact me. We will continue to evaluate this recommendation on an ongoing basis and will communicate when there is no longer such a recommendation with respect to meetings for public bodies.

County of Inyo

HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES DEPARTMENT

Public Health, Suite 203-C
1360 N. Main Street, Bishop CA 93514
TEL: (760) 873-7868 FAX: (760) 873-7800

Marilyn Mann, Director
mmann@inyocounty.us

Date: September 23, 2021

To: Inyo County Local Agency Governing Bodies

From: Dr. James Richardson, Inyo County Public Health Officer

Re: Continued Recommendation Re Social Distancing and Remote Meetings

In order to help minimize the spread of COVID-19, I recommend that physical/social distancing measures continue to be practiced throughout our Inyo County communities, including at public meetings of the Board of Supervisors and other public agencies.   Individuals continue to contract COVID-19 and spread the infection throughout our communities. Social distancing, masking, and vaccination are crucial mitigation measures to prevent the disease's spread. Remote public agency meetings allow for the participation of the community, agency staff, presenters, and board members in a safe environment, with no risk of contagion. As such, and since this disease negatively and directly impacts the ability of public agencies to conduct public meetings safely in person, it is my recommendation that local public agencies conduct their public meetings remotely.

This recommendation will remain in place until further notice.

Dr. James A. Richardson
Inyo County Health Officer

Strengthening Resilience & Well-Being in Our Community

January 28, 2022

To: Honorable Dee Dee Myers, Senior Advisor and Director
Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development (GO-Biz)

Honorable Samuel Assefa, Director
Governor's Office of Planning and Research (OPR)

Honorable Natalie Palugyai, Secretary
California Labor and Workforce Development Agency (LWDA)

From: The Eastern Sierra Council of Governments (ESCOG)

Thank you for the opportunity to submit follow up and reinforcing comments for letters that have been submitted by member agencies of the Eastern Sierra Council of Governments (ESCOG) – which include Mono County, Inyo County, the City of Bishop and the Town of Mammoth Lakes – on the Community Economic Resilience Fund (CERF) program regarding the proposed regions and planning process.

We would like to emphasize the importance of addressing the following matters of concern to our member agencies on behalf of the Eastern Sierra region:

The Sierra Nevada Mountain Range and CERF Regions
The proposed Eastern Sierra region includes seven counties: Mono, Inyo, Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, Tuolumne, and Mariposa. While these seven counties are connected as a grouping by adjacent county borders, Mono and Inyo Counties are separated geographically from the counties on the west side November through May by the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range because of the east-west highway winter pass closures. For most of the year when the passes are closed, there is no way to travel across the mountains from Inyo and Mono to Mariposa, Calaveras, Tuolumne, or Amador; rather, a visit to a "neighboring" county within the proposed region is a minimum 12-hour round trip, through the Central Valley and then back up into the mountains on the opposite side.

Because our neighboring counties on the west side are deceptively far away, we do not share an economy with them, and an analysis of commute patterns or labor market data would not show a relationship between east slope and west slope counties. A project or a

plan that is applicable to Mariposa, Tuolumne, Calaveras or Amador counties will not necessarily be applicable to Inyo or Mono - a boon to the economies of the counties on the western slope will not reach the eastern slope. For this reason, we join Mono County in recommending that the Eastern Sierra region include Mono, Inyo, and Alpine counties and that Amador, Calaveras, Tuolumne, and Mariposa be grouped together as their own region on the west side.

We respectfully request a reevaluation of this region, not because we have any issues working together as partners with our friends on the west side, but because developing a regional plan for economies where there is no trans-Sierra access for half the year could result in fragmentation of the planning process, a disparity in compatible projects and negatively impact the overall success and outcome of the program.

Sub-regional Planning

For regions with two or more counties, we respectfully request that the funded CERF planning process includes a sub-regional planning component to complement the macro plan for the region. Within the proposed Eastern Sierra Region, for example, the land mass covered is extremely vast – from Death Valley across the Sierra Nevada Mountain range to the Central Valley -- and includes geography, communities, resources, and labor pool access that are significantly diverse. A sub-regional planning element would benefit the individual partners in the region as well as the entire region. In this regard, we strongly suggest that the convenor, as the recipient for the planning funds, develop a specific component in the Eastern Sierra that can increase their capacity in our area to provide proper support for planning the anticipated economic development projects.

Eligible Applicants

We are disappointed by the fact that cities, counties, and councils of governments (COGs) are currently not listed as applicants eligible to apply directly for CERF funding as outlined in the program parameters provided by the Office of Planning and Research. It appears that eligible applicants only include non-profit organizations, Indigenous tribes, institutions of higher education, and District Organizations of an Economic Development District (EDD). Cities, counties or COGS are not included as eligible. Inyo and Mono Counties are not part of an EDD and as a result, our local municipal and county governments – key stakeholders in the CERF planning process – would be unable to apply. Indeed, many jurisdictions are not part of an EDD and so this exclusion creates broad inequities. We respectfully request a review of the eligibility criteria and for consideration to allow local government entities and jurisdictions to be added as eligible applicants. The Eastern Sierra Council of Governments (ESCOG) operates as a Joint Powers Authority, and was established specifically to take advantage of opportunities such as the CERF program.

<u>Equitable Funding Distribution</u>

We are concerned the requirement to have a single convener implementing CERF funding throughout the "Eastern Sierra" region will create inequitable geographic opportunities for both the planning and implementation phases of CERF funding distribution. There is at present very little economic development coordination between Eastern Sierra counties (Alpine, Inyo and Mono counties) and Western Sierra counties (Mariposa, Tuolumne, Calaveras and Amador counties) due to the physical geographic separation. Moreover, Eastern Sierra counties are exceptionally rural and under-resourced, placing the counties at a disadvantage to channel CERF resources into our communities. For instance, Inyo and Mono Counties are disadvantaged among counties in the "Eastern Sierra" district by not having a regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) in place to leverage during the planning phase of the CERF program, which has a proposed timeline of approximately five months in which counties can prepare to access critical economic development implementation funds. We request that the CERF guidelines mandate that a successful applicant to convene funding demonstrate existing relationships to elected representation and economic/community development organizations in each county included within the "Eastern Sierra" district, including letters of support from each County represented. We also request a base allocation of implementation funding be available to each County, with a timeline that guarantees under-resourced counties will have adequate time to ensure the implementation actions are strategic and impactful. Rural communities will not have capacity to compete with larger jurisdictions for competitive implementation funding.

<u>Procedural Transparency</u>

We request the CERF program guidelines incorporate the comments provided by the California Association for Local Economic Development (CALED) to provide clarification on funding implementation and expectations, specifically the following comments:

- Clearly identify criteria and application process for projects eligible for funding that are ready now to move forward.
- Create and communicate a transparent process for how projects will be reviewed and selected for funding in order to avoid any concern of bias or influence.
- Provide clarification on various industries may be assisted. For instance, the Treasury's document highlights addressing pandemic-related impacts to small business, travel, tourism and hospitality, while the CERF legislation focuses on various listed "sustainable and resilient industries." CERF program guidance should clarify this foundational issue.
- Clarify capital projects that may be funded. Understanding potential implementation projects will be central to successful planning. The CERF Program should be clear on which type of capital projects may be funded during implementation. Treasury's guidance appears to limit capital expenditures principally to water, sewer and broadband investments. The CERF Program should clarify the range of project that may be funded.

Furthermore, the CERF program should clarify the ability of applicants to coordinate implement funding with federal partners. Over 90% of land area in Inyo and Mono Counties

is under federal jurisdiction, and federal land management is integral to our region's economic development efforts and opportunities.

Thank you again for allowing us the opportunity to comment on the proposed regions for the CERF program. We look forward to the process and appreciate your consideration of our comments. If you should have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me at ekabala@escog.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

Elaine Kabala
Executive Director, Eastern Sierra Council of Governments

STAFF REPORT

To: ESCOG Joint Powers Authority

From: Elaine Kabala, ESCOG Staff

Subject: Increase in Budget Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2021-2022

Meeting date: February 4, 2022

Prepared on: January 27, 2022

Attachments: None

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BACKGROUND/HISTORY:

During the 2021-2022 Fiscal Year (FY), the ESCOG was awarded a California Department of Fish and Wildlife Proposition 1 grant in the amount of $3,384,269. The ESCOG received a conditional award for National Fish and Wildlife Federation (NFWF) grant in the amount of $247,300. The ESCOG has also secured a $500,000 line of credit from the Rural County Representatives of California.

Staff is requesting the Board increase appropriations for the FY 2021-2022 budget accordingly to facilitate grant implementation with an equal increase in grant revenues, and increase appropriations for principal repayment of the RCRC line of credit with an equal increase in revenue for the issuance of the line of credit. Both of the requested appropriation increases are offset by external revenue sources, so there is net $0 impact on the JPA's fund balance.

Staff estimates accomplishing approximately $500,000 of the CDFW Prop 1 grant scope and approximately $150,000 of the NFWF grant scope in the remainder of the fiscal year.

BUDGET IMPACTS:

If approved, $1,150,000 of spending will be added to the ESCOG budget for Fiscal Year 2021-2022, paid for with $650,000 of grant revenues and $500,000 of proceeds from the issuance of the line of credit.

LEGAL REVIEW:

ESCOG Counsel Grace Chuchla has reviewed this item and found that it complies with the law.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff requests the Board: 1) Approve an increase in appropriations by $650,000 for funds secured by grant revenues, and 2) Approve an increase in appropriations for principal repayment of the RCRC line of credit and an equal increase in revenue for the issuance of the RCRC line of credit.

STAFF REPORT

To:	ESCOG Joint Powers Authority
From:	Elaine Kabala, ESCOG Staff
Subject:	Visitor Connection Package Regional Funding Proposal
Meeting date:	February 4, 2022
Prepared on:	January 26, 2022
Attachments:	

A) SRTI: Connection to the Eastern Sierra Visitor Audience

- Visitor Connection Program
- Visitor Connection Program: Project Proposal Form for SNC
- Visitor Connection Package
- Visitor Connection Strategy

B) Visitor Connection Program: Deliverables by Component

C) Visitor Connection Program: Implementation Cost Summary

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BACKGROUND/HISTORY:

The Sustainable Recreation and Tourism Initiative included four tracks: 1) Regional Recreation and Stakeholder Engagement, 2) Climate Adaption and Resilience Assessment, 3) Connection to the Eastern Sierra Visitor Audience, and 4) Project Prioritization and Implementation Plan.

The "Connection to the Eastern Sierra Visitor Audience" track of the SRTI included extensive stakeholder collaboration for the development of a strategy to implement a regional voice for sustainable recreation and stewardship in the Eastern Sierra. The Visitor Connection Working Group (VCWG) was comprised of 28 invited representatives from regional organizations with a vast and diverse range of expertise engaging with the visitor audience. The Working Group was convened for 8 facilitated meetings over 14 months to establish the foundation for a 21st-century regional recreation identity for the

Eastern Sierra focused on stewardship and sustainability. These meetings culminated in the "Visitor Connection Package" which identifies a "Visitor Connection Program" to more efficiently and effectively communicate with the region's multimillion-member outdoor recreation audience along with the establishment of a "voice" that speaks for the Eastern Sierra as a region. The Strategic Marketing Group, which facilitated the VCWG meetings, has also produced a companion document to the "Visitor Connection Package" called the "Visitor Connection Strategy".

All four tracks of the SRTI identified the need for regionally consistent communication regarding stewardship and sustainable recreation as a high priority. The SRTI team investigated numerous avenues for potential grant funding to implement the Visitor Connection Program, however none were deemed "a good fit" for this project by the granting agencies.

ANALYSIS:

The vision of the Visitor Connection Package (VCP) is summarized by the following project statement: "By working together as a network of regional organizations, we strive to leverage sought after recreation experiences in the Eastern Sierra and emotional connections to the region for the purpose of preparing and educating both visitors and residents to embody a respectful mindset, promote visitor dispersion, and motivate stewardship behaviors, directly contributing to the sustainability of natural resources and gateway communities." The VCP is not intended as a marketing strategy – nor is it intended to replace the successful work done by regional marketing organizations. The VCP's "Visitor Connection Program" is intended to connect with visitors and residents to nurture stewardship of the natural and cultural resources of the Eastern Sierra by communicating directly with visitors and residents in-person, digitally, and with signage and kiosks. The program will:

- Identify and coordinate regional face-to-face communication opportunities;
- Building, develop, and maintain a regional website;
- Create turnkey content for digital outreach with social media assets, newsletters, and emails;
- Create a regional handbook with a training program for frontline employees;
- Coordinate signage and pop-up information kiosks;
- Develop a strategic messaging plan; and
- Research the visitation audience to maximize messaging efficacy.

The "Visitor Connection Strategy", a companion document to the VCP drafted by SMG consulting, identifies the following trends in the Eastern Sierra necessitating implementation of a proactive visitor communication strategy:

- The Eastern Sierra has (seen) significant increases in visitation throughout the region and increasing demand for recreation in semi-densely populated and dispersed areas.
- As with increased visitation and demand for recreation activities, the Eastern Sierra has experienced impacts on the natural environment resulting in overall environmental degradation and diminished recreation experiences. Examples include increased trash, crowding, parking in off-limits locations, erosion, human waste, and wear and tear on the natural environment.
- Resident pushback regarding some visitor behavior, as well as access to areas that residents have primarily enjoyed in the past, has brought more political pressure on city and county government.
- With the short- and long-term prospects for continued population growth in the Eastern Sierra's feeder markets, and increasing demand for outdoor experiences and activities, the current tourism model may be unsustainable. To outline a program to support sustainable recreation-based tourism, the Visitor Connection Package frames a regional approach to connect with the visitor audience and educate them on stewardship in the Eastern Sierra.

The "Visitor Connection Program" is structured to be implemented in phases. The proposed budget is approximately $780,000 to implement Phase 1 over approximately three years.

As discussed, the SRTI team researched several grant opportunities to independently fund VCP implementation, however, the project was deemed not to meet agency objectives for grant funding. Engaged funding opportunities included:

- U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) American Rescue Plan Programs
- Sierra Nevada Conservancy Vibrant Recreation and Tourism Proposition 68 Program
- Visit California Sub-Award of the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) American Rescue Plan Programs
- CAL FIRE Fire Prevention Grant
- CA Department of Parks & Recreation Recreational Trails Program

Staff requests your Board discuss funding implementation of the VCP's "Visitor Connection Program" through member agency contributions to the ESCOG for project implementation. The proposed funding request proposes member agency contributions proportionate to anticipated revenues for each jurisdiction as illustrated in Attachment C.

BUDGET IMPACTS:
None.

LEGAL REVIEW:
ESCOG Counsel Grace Chuchla has reviewed this item and found that it complies with the law.

RECOMMENDATION:
Staff requests that the Board discuss whether to recommend that funding for implementation of the Visitor Connection Program as presented be made through pro rata contributions from each member agency as detailed in the staff report.

If so recommended, to further direct staff to coordinate with member agencies such that an item be agendized for each agency to consider funding the Visitor Connection Program per their suggested contributions, and to report back to ESCOG staff in time for the ESCOG's next meeting on April 8 or June 10.

EASTERN SIERRA VISITOR CONNECTION PROGRAM

Photo: S. Roufs

SRTI PROJECT

Lead Agency:
Eastern Sierra
Council of Governments

20/21

EASTERN SIERRA
Sustainable Recreation Partnership

SUSTAINABLE
RECREATION
& TOURISM
INITIATIVE

VISITOR CONNECTION PROGRAM

The SRTI's Visitor Connection Working Group developed a strategy to connect with Eastern Sierra visitors throughout the region using messages of sustainable recreation and stewardship. The resulting Visitor Connection Program is a system for communicating with visitors and residents in-person, digitally, and with signage and kiosks. The program will:

- Identify and coordinate regional face-to-face communication opportunities;
- Build, develop, and maintain a regional website;
- Create turnkey content for digital outreach with social media assets, newsletters, and emails;
- Create a regional handbook with a training program for frontline employees;
- Coordinate signage and pop-up information kiosks;
- Develop a strategic messaging plan; and
- Research the visitation audience to maximize messaging efficacy.

ESSRP PROSPECTUS FOR FUTURE INVESTMENTS: ALIGNMENT

ECOSYSTEM STEWARDSHIP

VISITOR CONNECTION & MANAGEMENT

REGIONAL RECREATION CAPACITY

FUNDING APPLICATION LEAD AGENCY:

Eastern Sierra Council of Governments

Eastern Sierra Sustainable Recreation Partnership
Project Proposal Form

Project Name:
Eastern Sierra Visitor Connection Program – Development & Implementation of A Regional Voice for Sustainable Recreation in the Eastern Sierra

Agency Contact:
Name: Elaine Kabala
Title: Executive Director, Eastern Sierra Council of Governments (ESCOG)
Email: ekabala@escog.ca.gov
Phone: (323) 652-0390

Lead Agency:
EASTERN SIERRA COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS (ESCOG)
Other/ Multiple:

Land Manager:
N/A
Other/ Multiple:

Project Type:
Technical and Organizational Capacity

Project Description:
Provide brief description of discrete project deliverables

The Sustainable Recreation & Tourism Initiative's Visitor Connection Working Group developed a strategy to connect with Eastern Sierra visitors and residents throughout the region using messages of sustainable recreation and stewardship. The resulting Visitor Connection Program is a system for communicating with visitors and residents in-person, digitally, and with signage and kiosks. The program will:

- Identify and coordinate regional face-to-face communication opportunities;
- Build, develop, and maintain a regional website;
- Create turnkey content for digital outreach with social media assets, newsletters, and emails;
- Create a regional handbook with a training program for frontline employees;
- Coordinate signage and pop-up information kiosks;
- Develop a strategic messaging plan; and
- Research the visitation audience to maximize messaging efficacy.

The Visitor Connection Program is a scalable system and once developed, could incorporate other sustainability and ecosystem service messaging, such as fire prevention and restrictions, dispersed camping mitigation, climate adaptation, etc.

Stakeholders:
List/ provide a brief description of local/regional stakeholders

- *City of Bishop*
- *Inyo County*
- *Town of Mammoth Lakes*

Eastern Sierra Sustainable Recreation Partnership
Project Proposal Form

- *Mono County*
- *ESCOG*
- *Inyo National Forest*
- *Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest*
- *Alpine County*
- *Bureau of Land Management*
- *National Park Service*
- *Recreationists and visitors*
- *Tourism and recreation businesses*
- *DMOs, Visitor Bureaus and Chambers of Commerce of the Region*
- *Eastern Sierra Sustainable Recreation Partnership (ESSRP) members*

In a series of four meetings in 2021, the Eastern Sierra Sustainable Recreation Partnership(ESSRP) developed long term investment priorities for sustainable recreation in the region: "The ESSRP Prospectus for Future Investments." "Visitor Connection and Management" is one of eight identified "Regional Investment Priorities."

Sustainability:
Provide a brief description of how this project will incorporate sustainability as defined as a core-value of the ESSRP.]

Sustainability challenges in the Eastern Sierra are exacerbated by the fact that no one "voice" speaks for the Eastern Sierra as a region and communicates directly with its multimillion-member audience. The region's assets are managed by a variety of public agencies and private interests, yet while they aspire to work together, they are organized by conflicting and often contradictory missions. Profit inevitably clashes with stewardship; local and regional needs are subsumed by national policy interests legislated many thousands of miles away; each private interest, public agency, user group, and advocacy organization has its own voice, made possible by the availability and accessibility of contemporary technology. With no agreed-upon or consistent messaging for sustainable regional recreation, inconsistency, fractured communications, and confusion is inevitable. Visitors' resulting behavior is predictably incompatible with stewardship practices.[1]

Through the Visitor Connection Working Group, the diverse recreation interests in the Eastern Sierra gathered to form a unified system and voice for communicating with visitors. All elements of the program will work to educate visitors and residents about sustainable practices, such as alternative transportation, responsible recreation, public access closures, and stewardship opportunities. The program's communication infrastructure will be sustained by long-term commitments from its partners, and combinations of grant and membership-based funding.

ROI:
What is the Return on Investment (ROI) or Social Return on Investment (SROI) of this project? How will this project provide economic sustainability, create jobs and provide education opportunities, offset the cost of investment, or provide broader impacts including social and environmental metrics?

Visitation drives the region's recreation-based tourism economy and represents the primary challenge as well as the essential opportunity for achieving regional economic, social, and environmental sustainability.[2]

ROI/SROI is difficult to calculate, as the "profit" will not be shown as income or sales, but will return tangible and indirect value in many ways. The consolidation of regional sustainable messaging will:

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[1] Visitor Connection Package, Page 6
[2] Visitor Connection Package, Page 5

- Save staff time for each organization by providing turnkey assets, resources, and messaging infrastructure.
- Create a higher level of awareness for the message with all organizations promoting the same message.
- Utilize existing reach of participating organizations.
- Prevent costly destruction of natural resources.

Direct Job Creation: As recommended in the Visitor Connection Package, this program will fund three part-time positions, as well as work with additional consultants as needed.

Community Involvement: The Visitor Connection Program is the single project that was specifically recommended by all "tracks" of the Sustainable Recreation & Tourism Initiative (SRTI): "Regional Recreation Stakeholder Engagement", "Climate Adaptation & Resilience Assessment", "Connection to Eastern Sierra Visitor Audience", and "Project Development and Prioritization."

Recreation Stakeholder Alignment: 14% of all project ideas that were submitted by Recreation Stakeholders for the SRTI were about "education" or "outreach & communication." Recreation Stakeholders repeatedly expressed desire to promote sustainable recreation, provide reliable information, and improve the visitor experience.

Climate Vulnerability and Ecosystem Services Valuation: The ability to accurately disseminate sustainable recreation messaging to the region's visitors will help to properly steward our natural and cultural resources, ranging from keeping pollutants out of our waterways to preventing wildland fire to sharing historical and interpretive information. One of five "Recommended Actions" for the Eastern Sierra, from the expert climate team is "Sustainable Recreation Outreach and Education".[3] Key findings from "A Changing Climate: Vulnerability in California's Eastern Sierra" include:

- Ecosystem services provide an average of $95 billion per year in services to the Eastern Sierra region, with the highest valued service being carbon storage and water quality.
- Poor air quality, drought, extreme heat, and wildfire are projected to reduce the value ecosystem services by an average of $270 million (per year). Other hazards are also projected to have significant impacts.
- Wildfire creates the most vulnerabilities for all populations, recreation activities, and other community assets compared to other hazards in the region.
- More precipitation is likely to fall as rain instead of snow, reducing the winter recreation season and associated economic activities
- Water-based recreation activities are likely to decrease due in large part to increases in drought and extreme heat conditions.
- Summer recreation activities in all jurisdictions will likely be disrupted by climate change hazards.
- Changing temperature and precipitation patterns will likely cause widespread harm to forests, wetland, and aquatic habitats.
- Recreation and tourism industry workers are likely to face economic harm when recreation activities are disrupted.

The Visitor Connection Program presents the opportunity to help residents and visitors be better stewards of the natural resources on which the region's economy and way of life depends.

Benefits:
List/ provide brief description of benefits this project will provide

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[3] A Changing Climate: Vulnerability in California's Eastern Sierra - Recommended Actions, Page 7

Eastern Sierra Sustainable Recreation Partnership
Project Proposal Form

Guiding Principles[4] developed by the Visitor Connection Working Group specify that the program will:

- Focus on stewardship education and the celebration of local culture.
- Be reliable, implementable, and forward thinking.
- Utilize informed and collaborative decision-making.
- Employ a phased approach to develop tools and capacity.
- Leverage existing communication assets to engage visitors throughout their "sequence of encounter."
- Not compete with existing efforts in the region.

Program benefits can be summed up by the Opportunity Statement[5] that was created by the group:

"By working together as a network of regional organizations, we strive to leverage sought after recreation experiences in the Eastern Sierra and emotional connections to the region for the purpose of preparing and educating both visitors and residents to embody a respectful mindset, promote visitor dispersion, and motivate stewardship behaviors, directly contributing to the sustainability of natural resources and gateway communities."

Interagency Agreement:
What formal agreements or resolutions will be required to plan/implement this project?

ESCOG would require a resolution for implementation and funding of this program.

The ESCOG's Sustainable Recreation and Ecosystem Management Program (SREMP) was approved by ESCOG member agencies in January of 2021. Through the SREMP and related regional agreements, the ESCOG intends to support the Eastern Sierra Sustainable Recreation Partnership (ESSRP), submit funding applications on behalf of the region, and "...leverage its position as a regional entity to pursue funding opportunities that may not be accessible to other parties whose jurisdiction is limited to one specific national park, national forest, county, city, town, etc."[6]

Funding Strategies:
What funding opportunities have been researched for this project? What was the outcome of the research?

1. **U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) American Rescue Plan Programs**

The SRTI team looked into funding opportunities from EDA in Travel, Tourism and Outdoor Recreation and the Build Back Better Regional Challenge. The SRTI team and ESCOG executive director met with representatives from the EDA multiple times in the Fall of 2021, and the group ultimately decided that this project and funding opportunity were not a good match because the EDA's funding priority was physical infrastructure.

2. **Sierra Nevada Conservancy Vibrant Recreation and Tourism Proposition 68 Program**

The SRTI researched funding through the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, which turned down this project because it did not meet the requirements of Proposition 68 to build infrastructure. The SRTI funding team also worked with Elissa Brown, Sierra Nevada Conservancy's Partnerships and Community Support Coordinator, to identify other funding opportunities. Ms. Brown advised that it would be difficult to target a single funding source that would fund research, strategic planning, programming, and physical signage, and that the program may be better served by grant funding for each component. In

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[4] Visitor Connection Package, Page 7
[5] Visitor Connection Package, Page 12
[6] ESSRP Memorandum of Understanding

response, the SRTI team created a budget for the Visitor Connection Program that allows each component to be funded separately in support of the full program.

3. Local Funding through the ARPA State and Local Coronavirus Fiscal Recovery Funds

The local and city governments in the Eastern Sierra received federal funding to respond to support public health response, address negative economic impacts brought on by the pandemic, replace public sector revenue loss, award premium pay to essential workers, and improve water, sewer, and broadband infrastructure.

Given that the pandemic caused spikes and losses in visitation to the Eastern Sierra, local jurisdictions could choose to allocate funding to the Visitor Connection Program to bolster stewardship messaging and smooth tourism demand. The SRTI team will continue to work with the ESCOG on local funding opportunities for the Visitor Connection Program.

4. Visit California Sub-Award of the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) American Rescue Plan Programs

As part of the American Rescue Plan Act, the federal Economic Development Administration made Visit California eligible for a $45.9 million block grant that can be used for tourism marketing. Governor Gavin Newsom designated Visit California to invest the funding on behalf of the communities hardest hit by the pandemic. The SRTI team worked with Ryan Becker, vice president of Communications for Visit California, and Brian Wright, Director of Marketing at Mammoth Lakes Tourism, to showcase the Visitor Connection Program as a regional plan to manage tourism and promote sustainable recreation. As of November 17, indications are that Visit California will not be issuing sub-awards with the funding received.

5. CAL FIRE Fire Prevention Grant

CAL FIRE offers competitive grants that aim to reduce the potential for large and damaging wildfires and their resulting greenhouse gasses. The Visitor Connection Program could qualify as a fire prevention education program under this grant. However, as implementation of the Visitor Connection Program begins, the Program's leadership may want to produce messaging on a variety of stewardship topics. The CAL FIRE Fire Prevention Grant could be a better fit for specific messaging once the program structure is more developed.

6. CA Department of Parks & Recreation Recreational Trails Program

The Recreational Trails Program provides funds for trails and trails-related projects, including the development of motorized trail vehicle educational materials. Like the CAL FIRE grant above, this program could fund a specific messaging project for the Visitor Connection Program once the Program's infrastructure is in place.

Attachments:
- Visitor Connection Package
- Visitor Connection Strategy

Photo: S. Stoub

EASTERN SIERRA REGION

VISITOR CONNECTION PACKAGE

20/21

A Framework for the Development and Implementation of a Regional Voice for Sustainable Recreation in the Eastern Sierra

EASTERN SIERRA
Sustainable Recreation Partnership

SUSTAINABLE RECREATION & TOURISM INITIATIVE

Funded by a grant from Proposition 68 and the Sierra Nevada Conservancy

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Public lands in the United States hold the creation stories, burial grounds, and ceremonies of Indigenous people who were killed or forcibly removed from their ancestral homes during territorial acquisition.

Many tribes, comprised of different bands, live in the Eastern Sierra region, caring for their native lands as they coexist with the ongoing impacts of colonization. Past or present tribes and bands associated with the region that this effort is aware of include, but are not limited to, the Miwok, Mono Lake Kutzadika'a, Mono/Monache, Nüümü (Paiute), Newe (Shoshone), Timbi-Sha, Utu Utu Gwaitu Paiute, and Washoe.

Two Nüümü terms describe the region and provide important context to ideas offered in this document. The first is Pamidu Toiyabe (Western Mountains), and the other, more widely known, place name is Payahuunadü (The Place Where Water Flows).

This acknowledgement is an invitation to all organizations, residents, and visitors to recognize the way this history has shaped the present as all parties work together in anticipation of a better future.

Photo: S. Fouts

THE EASTERN SIERRA REGION

Legend:
- UNITED STATES
- CALIFORNIA
- THE EASTERN SIERRA REGION

USA states labeled: WA, OR, ID, NV, UT, AZ, MT, WY, CO, NM, TX

CA: San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Diego, EASTERN SIERRA

ALPINE COUNTY

MONO COUNTY
Yosemite National Park
Mammoth Lakes
Bishop

INYO COUNTY
Sequoia National Park
Kings Canyon National Park
Death Valley National Park

NEVADA / CALIFORNIA

0   25   50   100 Miles

VISITOR CONNECTION PACKAGE

INTRODUCTION

The Eastern Sierra & the Visitor Audience

The Eastern Sierra is a high-desert landscape in California that shares a common border with the state of Nevada. Composed of three California counties (Alpine, Mono, and Inyo), the region is defined by the Sierra Nevada mountain range, the western terminus of the Northern Basin and Range.

More than 90% of the region's 17,148 square miles is managed by federal government agencies, including the U.S. Forest Service, the National Park Service, and the Bureau of Land Management. The principal owner of the region's private property, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, acquired more than 450 square miles of farm and ranchland in the early years of the 20th century to secure water rights for the City of Los Angeles. The remaining private property and gateway communities are dispersed across the region, home to a permanent population of about 35,000 residents.

Unparalleled opportunities for outdoor recreation have compelled visitation for many generations. The Eastern Sierra hosts both the highest peak and lowest valley in the 48 contiguous United States, as well as the oldest living thing on Earth. Annual visitor estimates range between 4 and 7 million, principally from Southern California, but from across the country and around the globe as well. Visitation drives the region's recreation-based tourism economy and represents the primary challenge as well as the essential opportunity for achieving regional economic, social, and environmental sustainability.

Sustainability challenges are exacerbated by the fact that no one "voice" speaks for the Eastern Sierra as a region and communicates directly with its multimillion-member audience. The region's assets are managed by a variety of public agencies and private interests, yet while they aspire to work together, they are organized by conflicting and often contradictory missions. Profit inevitably clashes with stewardship; local and regional needs are subsumed by national policy interests legislated many thousands of miles away; each private interest, public agency, user group, and advocacy organization has its own voice, made possible by the availability and accessibility of contemporary technology. With no agreed-upon or consistent messaging for sustainable regional recreation, inconsistency, fractured communications, and confusion is inevitable. Visitors' resulting behavior is predictably incompatible with stewardship practices.

In spring 2019, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, an agency of the State of California, awarded a grant to the region for the Sustainable Recreation and Tourism Initiative, to include a deliverable titled "Connection to the Visitor Audience." Later that same year, the Visitor Connection Working Group was established, comprising 28 representatives of regional organizations with a vast and diverse range of expertise engaging with the visitor audience, from destination marketing organizations to recreation user groups.

Convened in a series of workshops over 14 months, and charged with identifying the components of a communications program to articulate a unified voice for the Eastern Sierra rooted in sustainable recreation and stewardship, the Visitor Connection Package that follows is the work product of the Visitor Connection Working Group. This package represents the foundation of a stewardship-focused communications program (the Visitor Connection Program), to be further developed with refined messaging and strategies for implementation beginning with its Guiding Principles.

The Visitor Connection Working Group
Meeting #1, December 11, 2019

GUIDING PRINCIPLES
THE VISITOR CONNECTION PROGRAM SHOULD:

★ Focus on stewardship education and the celebration of local culture.

★ Be reliable, implementable, and forward thinking.

★ Utilize informed and collaborative decision-making.

★ Employ a phased approach to develop tools and capacity.

★ Leverage existing communication assets to engage visitors throughout their "sequence of encounter."

★ Not compete with existing efforts in the region.

1 COMMUNICATION ASSETS

The first task of the Visitor Connection Working Group was for each organization to self-report information on their existing **communication assets**, channels, and capacities, including inventories of current stewardship programs and events. The resulting data provided insights into each organization's abilities to reach an audience, while also underscoring their limitations. Understanding the parameters of regional communications makes it possible to identify each agency's appropriate role in the voice for the Eastern Sierra.

The information shared by the Working Group illuminated which channels are most frequently used, and their potential reach, as well as which organizations are currently promoting stewardship through events or messaging. While coherent and consistent communications are needed to effectively encourage the visitor audience to embrace stewardship behaviors, understanding the degree to which existing channels may be utilized to promote a culture of stewardship informed many of the final recommendations for the Visitor Connection Program.

• All VCWG organizations provided information through an informal self-reported survey in January and February of 2020.
• Not all representatives have access to the data within their organizations and thus were unable to report certain elements.
• This is not a representative inventory of all assets in the region, but only those of participating organizations.

EYES & EARS

8M+
in-person interactions /YR

31M+
webpage views /YR

Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest/Bridgeport R.D.
Mono Lake Committee
Town of Mammoth Lakes
National Park Service
Bishop Area Chamber & Visitors Bureau
Mono County Economic Development
Mammoth Lakes Tourism (MLT)
Pacific Crest Trail Association
Mammoth Mountain Ski Area

1.4M 3.9M 4.2M 20M

SOCIAL MEDIA

1.2M+ Facebook followers

400,000
350,000
300,000
250,000
200,000
150,000
100,000
50,000

MLT
Mono Co. E.D.
Pacific Crest Trail Assn.
Mammoth Mountain Ski Area

649,188 → Instagram followers

194,210 → Twitter followers

54,013 → Pinterest followers

Other digital platforms in use: Vimeo, YouTube, LinkedIn

NEWS

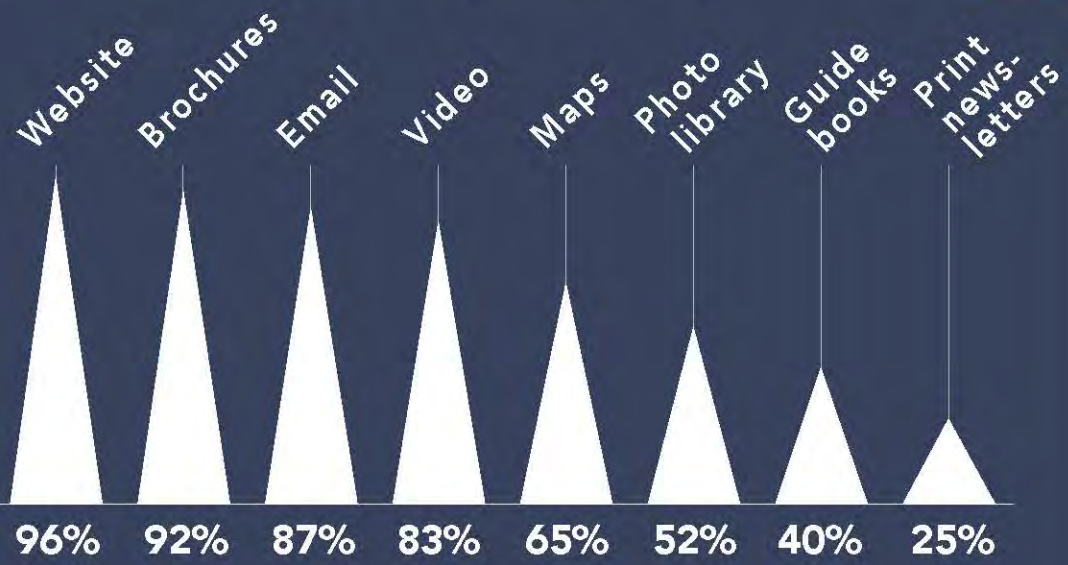Total number of email newsletter subscribers

Email **637,832**

Print **34,327**

Total number of print newsletter subscribers

CHANNELS

Percentage of organizations using:

Website	Brochures	Email	Video	Maps	Photo library	Guide books	Print news-letters
96%	92%	87%	83%	65%	52%	40%	25%

STEWARDSHIP

63%

ARE CURRENTLY PROMOTING STEWARDSHIP THROUGH EVENTS OR MESSAGING

Of participating organizations…

Host (or help host) **STEWARDSHIP EVENTS**

Share (or help share) **STEWARDSHIP MESSAGING**

37% DO NOT

REGIONAL EVENTS

EVENTS ACROSS THE REGION*

The Death Ride

BioBlitz

Restoration & Revegetation

Founder's Day Celebration

ATV Jamboree

Autumn Beer Festival
Leaves in the Loop

Bodie Ghost Run

Friends of Bodie Day

Bodie Late Nights

Tioga Pass Run

Trail Days

July 4th Fireworks Spectacular

Spring Expo

.5k Fun Run

Night of Lights

Film Events

Village Events

Andrea Lawrence Award Dinner

POOch Patrol

Pilgrimage

Haunted Halloween

Mountainfilm

Tri-County Fair

Whiteout Extravaganza

Mule Days

Blake Jones Trout Derby

Business Excellence/Gala

Hands on the Land

Fall Training Lunch

Spring Training Lunch

Annual Meeting

Winter Speaker Series

Wild & Scenic Film Festival

Eastern Sierra History Conference

Sierra Cycle Challenge

Alabama Hills Day

Earth Day

Gran Fondo

U.S. Grand Prix

In the Wilderness

Archaeology Volunteer Program

Winter Adventure Series

Community BBQ

Performing Arts

Trail Dirt Live

Visual Arts

Movie Nights

Trail Skills Colleges

Historical Societies

Docent Programs

Softball Tournaments

Mono Basin Bird Chautauqua

National Public Lands Day

NEVADA
CALIFORNIA

*partial list

2

CONNECTING WITH THE EASTERN SIERRA VISITOR

Visitors to the Eastern Sierra are members of a well-established and reliable community that regularly travels from all parts of California and the world to enjoy the region's recreation activities and destinations. The goal of the Working Group is not to encourage new visitation, but rather to effectively communicate with the existing multimillion-strong visitor audience. When addressing a collective of this size and sophistication, it made sense to explore the use of traditional marketing tools to establish a foundation for future communication efforts: an opportunity statement and a persona.

The **Opportunity Statement** presented herein identifies the need for Eastern Sierra organizations to work together, to harness the emotional connections that the visitor audience has for the region, and to focus all parties on the urgent need for sustainability through the creation of a culture of stewardship.

Persona: The Eastern Sierra Visitor presented herein describes visitors who have already made their decision to come to the Eastern Sierra and focuses on their positive, idealistic, and aspirational characteristics. While personas typically are created to reflect various archetypes, this version is broad and includes a visitor from outside the region as well as a resident, both of whom are participating in recreation- or tourism-related activities. This persona focuses on the connections that the Eastern Sierra delivers to all—a foundation for communications focused on stewardship for a much-beloved landscape.

An opportunity statement is a carefully crafted explanation of a current undesirable situation, its impacts, and the ideal preferred state.

Source: https://projectbliss.net/opportunity-statement/

A marketing persona is a detailed "fictional" representation of an actual user and is applied in the early stages of product development or product redesign.

Source: https://digitalagencynetwork.com/how-to-create-personas-for-marketing/

Page 44 of 168

OPPORTUNITY STATEMENT

By working together as a network of regional organizations, we strive to leverage sought-after recreation experiences in the Eastern Sierra and emotional connections to the region for the purpose of preparing and educating both visitors and residents to embody a respectful mindset, promote visitor dispersion, and motivate stewardship behaviors, directly contributing to the sustainability of natural resources and gateway communities.

PERSONA: THE EASTERN SIERRA VISITOR

This person is motivated by the enjoyment and experience of time spent outside, regardless of whether they are exploring for the first time or going the distance to be distanced.

This visitor balances their personal ways of connecting to the outdoors with community- or family-oriented activities. This includes a wide variety of outdoor activities and ways of accessing them.

They seek out beautiful and unique natural resources throughout the region.

This visitor sees the Eastern Sierra as a special place where they seek connection to the land, family, friends, ancestors, history, tradition, or themselves. The importance of these experiences compels them to leave their regular environment and spend their time, energy, and money in this pursuit.

While this person looks for connection in ways that are specific to them, they may or may not be aware of the complex history of the region or the realities and experiences of other visitors and local residents.

They expect to be able to re-create their positive experiences in the Eastern Sierra, and that the Eastern Sierra will always be here for them.

3 FRAMING A REGIONAL MESSAGE

Words and images, often enhanced with sound, are the currency of contemporary communications and the essential elements of a voice that speaks on behalf of any region.

When asked to describe the Eastern Sierra using only **words**, the Visitor Connection Working Group provided a brainstorm of 16 candidates. Through discussion and further refinement, these evolved into four **themes** articulating what the Eastern Sierra is, what visitors expect it to be, and the stewardship ethic the Working Group hopes to inspire in the Eastern Sierra visitor.

The Working Group conducted a similar exercise using only **images**, pairing the four themes with a selection of photographs and then sharing their rationale for these choices. The images and rationales define the Working Group's values for the characteristics of visual messaging to be used to represent the Eastern Sierra.

These words, themes, and images will provide a strong foundation for the development of sustainable-recreation messaging campaigns to connect with the Eastern Sierra visitor audience using an authentic and unified regional voice.

WORDS THAT DESCRIBE THE EASTERN SIERRA

scenic dramatic
significant magnificent
nature lasting
adventure connection
escape tradition
expansive timeless
unique grand

MESSAGING THEMES FOR THE EASTERN SIERRA

RESPECT - APPRECIATION - STEWARDSHIP

ESCAPE - ADVENTURE - SURPRISE

MEMORY - TRADITION - CONNECTION

EXPANSIVE - DRAMATIC - TIMELESS

ALIGNING IMAGES WITH THEMES

RESPECT - APPRECIATION - STEWARDSHIP

ESCAPE - ADVENTURE - SURPRISE

MEMORY - TRADITION - CONNECTION

EXPANSIVE - DRAMATIC - TIMELESS

RESPECT - APPRECIATION - STEWARDSHIP

Rationale for image selections:

• This image represents Respect. The "shame game" does not work to inspire people to do the right thing and to take appropriate actions; this image demonstrates mutual support and empathy, as well as community and engagement. While the image is obviously out of context for the Eastern Sierra, its values resonate. To be specific to our area, the image needs context outside of the immediate moment—a connection to all of the positive messages, but representing the unique timeline and cultures of the Eastern Sierra, and embracing multiple generations.

• This image represents Appreciation. It articulates the enduring and ancient nature of the Eastern Sierra. The clean, clear, and direct image aligns with Eastern Sierra values of strong character and constancy. It would benefit from the inclusion of human beings and the articulation of the human relationship to these values that are unique to the region. The bristlecones, as the world's oldest trees, command respect and appreciation and need stewardship.

• This image represents Stewardship. It portrays a positive image of human beings actively engaged in caring for the land. For the Eastern Sierra, images of stewardship should include activities of education and interpretation, and should also represent multigenerational and multicultural efforts.

ESCAPE - ADVENTURE - SURPRISE

Rationale for image selections:

• This image represents Escape and Surprise. The radio dish is a "cool curiosity"—not what folks expect to see in the Eastern Sierra. On the other hand, the night-sky view is a regional feature. It is something that many people and places do not have, and it makes us think about the possibilities of what is out there. There is an interesting connection to the Consortium For Dark Skies and their focus on stewardship of the night sky. Even the sky needs protection.

• This image represents Escape. It is a big landscape shot. The person jumping brings to mind escape and freedom. This picture was chosen to represent the areas of the region that are desert, with less of an alpine feeling. The group intentionally did not select the traditional photos that might already be represented in regional marketing and communications. The group also discussed whether to show negative, but realistic, images, such as long lines at the grocery store, as a way of setting expectations and suggesting more-sustainable visitation decision-making, but did not select any of the negative photos offered.

• This image represents Surprise and Adventure. It features a juxtaposition of swimming and ice in the water. This is unexpected; it's not the normal alignment. The group discussed the desire to show human-powered and back-country options rather than lift-assisted activities as a way to represent this theme. The large group discussed the need to be aware of the negative safety message of a single swimmer or solo adventurer; promoting this is not advised by regional search-and-rescue programs. Additionally, the notion of solitude is not a realistic representation of many popular destinations.

MEMORY - TRADITION - CONNECTION

Rationale for image selections:

• This image represents multi-generational family use. It's important to represent a wide range of ages. Images that are close enough to show faces help represent people in the act of connecting with each other. They don't have to be actually doing their activity; images of people reminiscing afterwards really convey the experience of connecting and making memories. It's also important that the landscape where the adventure is occurring is unique to the area, not generic. Fun and joy are important qualities to convey.

• This image represents Tradition in general. Traditional Native American handicrafts, which are unique to the region and something visitors would be interested in knowing more about, are especially important, as long as anything Native is represented respectfully (e.g., no images of petroglyphs). It shows someone executing a skill correctly, which speaks to the fact that any imagery should carefully avoid depicting anyone exhibiting incorrect etiquette or recreation behavior.

• This image represents Tradition and inclusivity; that everyone is welcome is an important message. It's important to show a wide diversity of uses. Many activities have traditions here.

EXPANSIVE - DRAMATIC - TIMELESS

Rationale for image selections:

• It is not clear if this is an image of dust, smoke, or some natural weather event, but it is clear that, whatever it is, it is large and looming. That uncertainty prompts powerful discussion about impacts to the land and people, such as climate change, and provokes thoughts and questions about how our actions contribute to solutions or to furthering the problem. This image conveys the theme and an important issue, but the group did not know how to communicate what people should do to address it.

• This image of a bristlecone pine is an apt symbol of nature's timeless beauty and shows one of the unique elements in the region. The surrounding landscape contrasting with the sky, combined with the angle of the photo and colors, brings out the other parts of the theme: Dramatic and Expansive. Another quality the group identified as important for visual associations with the Eastern Sierra is "authentic" or "real" images without filters. Nature can speak for itself, and it's important to avoid the misleading impression that the land is not impacted by visitation.

• The group liked the irony of how at first it seemed like carefully laid-out historical artifacts, but, thinking about what the artifacts are, it was clear that it is actually rediscovered trash from the past. The group felt that this image allows for deeper consideration of what story our trash tells by prompting questions about human impacts, such as: "How long will your trash stay?", "Who will find your trash?", and "What does your trash say about your time?" This felt especially important after seeing increased visitation and different kinds of trash due to COVID-19.

4 IMPLEMENTING THE VISITOR CONNECTION PROGRAM

Drawing on their combined expertise and experience, the Visitor Connection Working Group provided input on the desired communication tools and the necessary components of a viable program to establish and maintain a regional voice that communicates the message of sustainable recreation to its audience. These insights have been organized into a recommended **Visitor Connection Program** with three phases, each building on the previous and incorporating priorities identified by the Working Group.

The phased approach is a practical one, allowing for flexibility and incremental growth to scale, including both immediate and long-term actions.

The Visitor Connection Program highlights three fundamental program needs identified by the Working Group for the program's success: funding for staff and technical support; formation of an advisory committee; and securing of commitments from regional organizations to participate in the Program and amplify its messaging.

VISITOR CONNECTION PROGRAM

GROUP'S RECOMMENDED TOOLS & CHANNELS
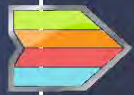
→ ## ACTION PLAN

GROUP'S RECOMMENDED TOOLS & CHANNELS

Face-to-Face Interactions

Website Landing Page

Branded Digital Outreach Toolkit

Regional Handbook

Pop-Up Information Kiosks

Signage on Highway 395

ACTION PLAN

Secure funding for Phase I

Identify and coordinate regional face-to-face communication opportunities

Website: Build, develop, and maintain

Create turnkey content for Digital Outreach Toolkit with assets for social media, newsletters, and email lists

Create Regional Handbook content with training program for frontline employees

Coordinate Pop-Up Information Kiosk program

Coordinate Signage Implementation

Develop Visitor Connection Program Strategic Plan

Initiate research to better understand visitation audience and maximize messaging efficacy

PHASE I | **PHASE II** | **PHASE III** | **PROGRAM NEEDS**
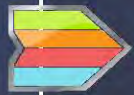
PHASE III

PHASE II

PHASE I

VISITOR CONNECTION PROGRAM

VISITOR CONNECTION PROGRAM

GROUP'S RECOMMENDED TOOLS & CHANNELS

→

ACTION PLAN

GROUP'S RECOMMENDED TOOLS & CHANNELS

Website Upgrades

On-the-Ground Programs
  Local Host and Ranger Programs
  Out-of-Region Ambassador Partnerships

Analog Collateral
  Regionally Coordinated Map Series
  FAQ Handheld Product
  Posters/Flyers
  Business Card directing visitors to
    landing page and stewardship message

Expand Digital Collateral
  Strategic digital ad buys
  Toolkit expansion

ACTION PLAN

Secure funding for Phase II

Website upgrades made as required

Work with Advisory Committee and local organizations to develop on-the-ground priority programs

Create content for analog collateral, oversee production, coordinate distribution

Create additional digital collateral to be determined by Phase I Strategic Plan. Recommendations include video, radio ads, podcast, ad buys, and additional turnkey graphics

Ongoing research to better understand visitation audience and maximize messaging efficacy

Phase I ongoing:
  Continued management
  Review and refine program elements

PHASE I

PHASE II

PHASE III

PROGRAM NEEDS

PHASE III

PHASE II

PHASE I

VISITOR CONNECTION PROGRAM

VISITOR CONNECTION PROGRAM

GROUP'S RECOMMENDED TOOLS & CHANNELS

→

ACTION PLAN

Expanded Content for
   Stewardship Education and
   Celebration of Local Culture

Support and Incentive Program

Visitor Connection Research Program

Other tools and channels
to be determined

Secure funding for Phase III

Create expanded content for
stewardship education and the
celebration of regional culture

Develop grant-based financial
incentives for engagement from
non-profits, businesses, and other
elements of the community

Ongoing research to better understand
visitation audience and maximize
messaging efficacy

Phase I & II ongoing:
   Continued management
   Review and refine program elements

PHASE I   PHASE II   **PHASE III**   PROGRAM NEEDS

PHASE III

PHASE II

PHASE I

VISITOR CONNECTION PROGRAM

VISITOR CONNECTION PROGRAM

⭐ **VISITOR CONNECTION PROGRAM will require:**

- Budget
- Advisory Committee
- Organizational commitment to use recommended tools, channels, and action plan

⭐ **VISITOR CONNECTION PROGRAM funded positions will include:**

- Program Coordinator
- Field Coordinator
- Technical Support
- Consultant Support (as needed)

PHASE I **PHASE II** **PHASE III** **PROGRAM NEEDS**

PHASE III

PHASE II

PHASE I

VISITOR CONNECTION PROGRAM

5 ABOUT

The Working Group

From destination marketers to recreation user groups, this document captures the input and thought leadership of 28 organizations with expertise engaging with the region's visitor audience. Carl Ribaudo of SMG Consulting developed the strategic framework and provided facilitation services over a 14-month process to create this Visitor Connection Package.

The Sustainable Recreation and Tourism Initiative is grateful for the contributions and participation of the following:

The Visitor Connection Working Group, February 2021

Alabama Hills Stewardship Group, Kathy Bancroft
Alpine County, David Griffith
Alpine County Chamber of Commerce, Mark Schwartz
Bishop Climbers Coalition, Ali Feinberg & Tim Golden
Bishop Chamber of Commerce & Visitors Bureau, Tawni Thomson & Julie Faber
Bureau of Land Management, Ron Napoles & Jeff Starosta
California State Parks, Catherine Jones
Disabled Sports Eastern Sierra, Laura Beardsley
Eastern Sierra Conservation Corps, Agnes Vianzon
Eastern Sierra Four Wheel Drive Club, Mike Sornborger
Eastern Sierra Interpretive Association, Jeff Gabriel
Friends of the Inyo, Alex Ertaud & Wendy Schneider
High Sierra Energy Foundation/Eastern Sierra Green Business Program, Pam Bold

Humboldt Toiyabe National Forest, Jan Cutts & Erica Hupp
Inyo County, Carma Roper
Inyo National Forest, Deb Schweizer
Los Angeles Department of Water & Power, Jessica Johnson
Mammoth Lakes Chamber of Commerce, Ken Brengle
Mammoth Lakes Recreation, Kim Anaclerio, Matt McClain, & Matt Paruolo
Mammoth Lakes Tourism, Matt Gebo
Mammoth Resorts (Mammoth Mountain), Joani Lynch
Mono County, Alicia Vennos
Mono Lake Committee, Geoff McQuilkin & Claire Landowski
National Park Service, Bernadette Johnson
Pacific Crest Trail Association, Ben Barry
Town of Mammoth Lakes, Stuart Brown

The Sustainable Recreation & Tourism Initiative

In the spring of 2019, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy's Governing Board demonstrated a pioneering commitment to rural California's outdoor recreation economy and natural resources by authorizing Proposition 68 funding for the "Sustainable Recreation and Tourism Initiative," a project to benefit the Conservancy's Eastern sub-region, including Inyo, Mono, and Alpine Counties.

The Initiative supports the Eastern Sierra Sustainable Recreation Partnership in its goals to, "… design, plan, implement, and report out projects to improve and maintain recreational opportunities as well as restore ecosystems to their natural resiliency and functions." The Initiative is composed of four tracks, or areas of focus, with specific deliverables: Regional Recreation Stakeholder Engagement; Climate Adaptation & Resilience Assessment; Connection to the Eastern Sierra Visitor Audience; and Project Development & Prioritization for Funding.

https://mltpa.org/essrp/sustainable-recreation-and-tourism-project

Eastern Sierra Sustainable Recreation Partnership

The Eastern Sierra Sustainable Recreation Partnership is a unique and locally generated public/public partnership between Eastern Sierra governments, state agencies, and federal agencies, including the U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, and the Bureau of Land Management.

Please view the webpage to see a list of current partners.

https://www.essrp.org/

Carl Ribaudo, SMG Consulting

Carl Ribaudo is the President and Chief Strategist for SMG Consulting, a tourism and recreation consulting firm located in South Lake Tahoe. The firm specializes in cooperative approaches to tourism challenges and opportunities. SMG provided a variety of services, including meeting content development, research, facilitation, and strategic direction.

https://www.smgonline.net/

Mammoth Lakes Trails & Public Access Foundation

The Mammoth Lakes Trails and Public Access Foundation, MLTPA, is a 501(c) 3 non-profit organization incorporated in 2007 as a public benefit corporation in the State of California. MLTPA has been engaged with local and regional issues of sustainable recreation and collaboration in California's Eastern Sierra since its inception and provides technical support to a regional public/public recreation-based solution, the Eastern Sierra Sustainable Recreation Partnership. MLTPA provided a variety of services including grant and project management, meeting content development, research, meeting convening, public and participant communications, and document production.

https://www.mltpa.org/

For More Information

About the Visitor Connection Package:
https://mltpa.org/essrp/sustainable-recreation-and-tourism-project/visitor-audience

About the Sustainable Recreation & Tourism Initiative:
https://mltpa.org/essrp/sustainable-recreation-and-tourism-project

About the Eastern Sierra Sustainable Recreation Partnership:
https://www.essrp.org

About SMG Consulting:
https://www.smgonline.net

About MLTPA:
https://mltpa.org

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www.outdoorexposurephoto.com

Trail work - Friends of the Inyo

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Night sky - Michael Ver Sprill | Dreamstime.com

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Page 20, Photographs Left to Right:

Fishing - Town of Mammoth Lakes

Native American baskets - Travel Nevada

Adaptive outing - Chelsea Taylor

Page 21, Photographs Left to Right:

Dust storm - Great Basin Unified Air Pollution
Control District

Bristlecone sunset - Neutronman | Dreamstime.com

Organized historic trash - NPSPhoto/Tom Alex

Pages 9, 23-25:

Crowd background vector -
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SIERRA NEVADA
CONSERVANCY

PROP 68
State of California
Parks + Water Bond 2018
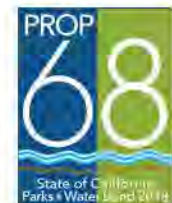
Carl Ribaudo
ANALYST & STRATEGIST

EASTERN SIERRA REGION

VISITOR CONNECTION STRATEGY

Photo: Simpson

20/21

EASTERN SIERRA
Sustainable Recreation Partnership

SUSTAINABLE RECREATION & TOURISM INITIATIVE

Funded by a grant from Proposition 68 and the Sierra Nevada Conservancy

essrp.org

Visitor Connection Strategy

Eastern Sierra Sustainable Recreation and Tourism Initiative

SMGConsulting

TAKE ANOTHER PATH.

December 2021

Table of Contents

Grant Acknowledgment

Funding for this project has been provided by the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, an agency of the State of California, under the California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoor Access For All Act of 2018 (Proposition 68) and in support of the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program.

Land Acknowledgment

Public lands in the United States hold the creation stories, burial grounds, and ceremonies of Indigenous people who were killed or forcibly removed from their ancestral homes during territorial acquisition.

Many tribes, comprised of different bands, continue to live in the Eastern Sierra region, caring for their native lands as they coexist with the ongoing impacts of colonization. Past or present tribes and bands associated with the region that this effort is aware of include, but are not limited to, the Miwok, Mono Lake Kutzadika'a, Mono/Monache, Nüümü (Paiute), Newe (Shoshone), Timbisha, Utu Utu Gwaitu Paiute, and Washoe.

Two Nüümü terms describe the region and provide important context to ideas offered in this initiative. The first is Pamidu Toiyabe (Western Mountains), and the other, more widely known, place name is Payahuunadü (The Place Where Water Flows).

This acknowledgment is an invitation to all organizations, residents, and visitors to recognize the way this history has shaped the present as all parties work together in anticipation of a better future.

Project Overview

The Sustainable Recreation & Tourism Initiative

In spring 2019, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy's Governing Board demonstrated a pioneering commitment to rural California's outdoor recreation economy and natural resources by authorizing Proposition 68 funding for the Sustainable Recreation & Tourism Initiative, a project to benefit the Conservancy's East Subregion, including Inyo, Mono, and Alpine Counties.

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For more information: mltpa.org/essrp/sustainable-recreation-and-tourism-project

About the "Connection to the Eastern Sierra Visitor" Track

In spring 2019, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy awarded a grant to the region for the Sustainable Recreation & Tourism Initiative, to include a deliverable titled "Connection to the Visitor Audience." Later that same year, the Visitor Connection Working Group was established, comprising 28 representatives of regional organizations with a vast and diverse range of expertise in engaging with the visitor audience, from destination marketing organizations to recreation user groups.

Convened in a series of workshops over 14 months and charged with identifying communications-program components to articulate a unified voice for the Eastern Sierra rooted in sustainable recreation and stewardship, the Visitor Connection Working Group created the Visitor Connection Package. This document is a comprehensive strategy, including implementation steps.

About the Visitor Connection Working Group

From destination marketers to recreation user groups, this document captures the input and thought leadership of 28 organizations with expertise in engaging with the region's visitor audience. Carl Ribaudo of SMG Consulting developed the strategic framework and provided facilitation services over a 14-month process to create this Visitor Connection Package.

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The Eastern Sierra Sustainable Recreation Partnership

The Eastern Sierra Sustainable Recreation Partnership (ESSRP) is a unique public/public partnership among Eastern Sierra governments, state agencies, and federal agencies.

Participating agencies include Alpine County; the City of Bishop; the Bureau of Land Management; Caltrans District 9; Inyo County; the Town of Mammoth Lakes; Mono County; the National Park Service; Inyo National Forest, Pacific Southwest Region (USFS Region 5); and Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, Intermountain Region (USFS Region 4).

About the Consultants

SMG Consulting: Carl Ribaudo is the president and chief strategist for SMG Consulting, a tourism and recreation consulting firm located in South Lake Tahoe, California. The firm specializes in cooperative approaches to tourism challenges and opportunities.

SMG provided various services, including meeting content development, research, facilitation, and strategic direction.
www.smgonline.net

Mammoth Lakes Trails & Public Access Foundation: The Mammoth Lakes Trails & Public Access Foundation (MLTPA) is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization incorporated in 2007 as a public benefit corporation in the State of California. MLTPA has been engaged with local and regional issues of sustainable recreation and collaboration in California's Eastern Sierra since its inception and provides technical support to a regional public/public recreation-based solution, the Eastern Sierra Sustainable Recreation Partnership.

MLTPA provided various services for this process, including grant and project management, meeting content development, research, meeting convening, public and participant communications, and document production.
www.mltpa.org

Executive Summary

The Visitor Connection Strategy represents a timely and needed response to a changing marketplace marked by a significant increase in visitation and outdoor recreation participation in the Eastern Sierra.

This strategy focuses on developing a forward-looking sustainable approach to recreation in the Eastern Sierra that will accommodate predicted increases in visitation and mitigate impacts to natural resources.

The Need for the Strategy

This need is a result of several primary factors, including the following:

The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

2020 saw the emergence of a new coronavirus and its resulting respiratory illness, COVID-19, which dramatically changed visitation behavior throughout the Eastern Sierra. Many California residents increased the demand for outdoor recreation locations away from dense urban populations, increasing the impact on natural resources.

California Population Growth

One of the most impactful forces of change is the growth of the California population, reaching approximately 40 million and concentrating in centers near and accessible to tourism destinations like the Eastern Sierra.

Strong Economic Growth

Another dynamic impacting peak travel is the strong economy, which has been positive since the recession. Moving into a third year of COVID-19 has been generally positive, which has enabled more consumers to travel.

Tourism Funding

Another driving force impacting peak travel has been the dramatic increase in tourism promotion funding made available by the creation of Tourism Business Improvement Districts (TBIDs), generating more than $250 million in tourism promotion funding in California.

The Partnership

The working group, assembled from a cross-section of public and private organizations throughout the Eastern Sierra, developed a set of guiding principles that focus on stewardship, education, and the celebration of local culture and do not compete with existing efforts within the region.

The Strategy Framework, Opportunity, and Supporting Organizational Assets

The Visitor Connection Strategy framework consists of three elements: understanding the current opportunity, creating a strategy, and transforming the created strategy into implementation steps leading to on-the-ground achievements.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the region, it also created an opportunity to craft a regional approach with a working partnership and collaboration among partners. This

partnership focused on changing visitor mindsets, educating visitors, and creating sustainability with visitors and the natural environment. The problems and opportunities serve as a basis for developing and guiding the Visitor Connection Strategy.

The strategy seeks to take advantage of a wealth of organizational assets that already exist and can be used to assist in promoting appropriate stewardship messaging. These assets are varied and include the following:

- ➢ 8 million direct in-person interactions with the public per year
- ➢ 31 million webpage views per year
- ➢ 1.2 million Facebook followers
- ➢ 650,000 Instagram followers
- ➢ 194,000 Twitter followers
- ➢ 54,000 Pinterest followers
- ➢ 637,000 email newsletter subscribers
- ➢ 34,000 print newsletter subscribers

Together with partners' assets and organizational support, these tools can be integrated to provide a focused Visitor Connection Strategy with desired stewardship messaging.

Eastern Sierra Messaging Objectives and Strategy

The Eastern Sierra messaging objectives are designed to maximize the opportunities that have been identified previously. They include the following:

1. Support organizations' existing stewardship messages.

2. Leverage the power of Eastern Sierra marketing channels.

3. Leverage the financial resources of the Eastern Sierra for message reach.

4. Create awareness for the Eastern Sierra stewardship message.

5. Educate potential visitors on stewardship practices.

6. Measure the effectiveness of messaging efforts.

The messaging strategy comprises two elements: to use the partnership's existing tools to reach potential visitors, and to support partner message outreach and create a unified message and resource for the region. The purpose of the strategy is to support the partner organization and not compete with them.

Implementation

Implementation of the strategy includes three phases. Each phase is designed to build upon the previous phase. The implementation starts with capacity building to support the strategy and builds on each previous phase to full implementation.

The organizational structure includes two essential elements where the Visitor Connection Package fits in the mix of regional organizations and how the effort will be organized to operate and implement programs.

To execute the strategy, there is a need to develop a phased budget for implementation with commitments from the membership to a sustained funding level. The funding model calls for a tiered approach to allow partners to support the effort with different levels of funding.

Section 1: The Eastern Sierra

A. Snapshot Overview

The Eastern Sierra is the nation's ecological and geological crown jewel. Sprawling from desert valleys to high peaks, the landscape is enriched by communities imbued with cultural, historical, natural, and recreational opportunities second to none.

Located in the east-central section of California, the Eastern Sierra landscape is rough and spectacular. It is one of California's most remote and rural locations. The region is approximately 250 miles from Alpine County to the north to Inyo County to the south. The region's average width is 38 miles from the Sierra Nevada mountain range west to the Nevada state line on the east. Mountainous wilderness abounds on the western side of the region, while communities line the central corridor along Highway 395, and desert adventures play out to the east.

The economy is rural and highly tourism-dependent. The region has developed as a tourism destination based on its surrounding natural assets and land-ownership limitations. Currently, tourism is the region's largest employer, supporting economic sectors including professional services, government, military, and, to a much lesser degree, ranching and agriculture.

The overall population of the counties of the Eastern Sierra is 33,702.

B. The Eastern Sierra Tourism Economy

Among the three counties, tourism generates approximately $1 billion in travel spending, 9,200 jobs, and $54 million in local taxes per year. As such, proactive management of the tourism industry is critical for residents and local government.

1. Travel Spending

The tourism economy has seen significant growth between 2010 and 2019. Travel spending rose from $653 million to $976 million, an increase of 49%. This increase is in large part a result of a strong national and state economy as well as an increase in tourism marketing efforts.

Eastern Sierra Travel Spending 2010–2019 ($Millions)
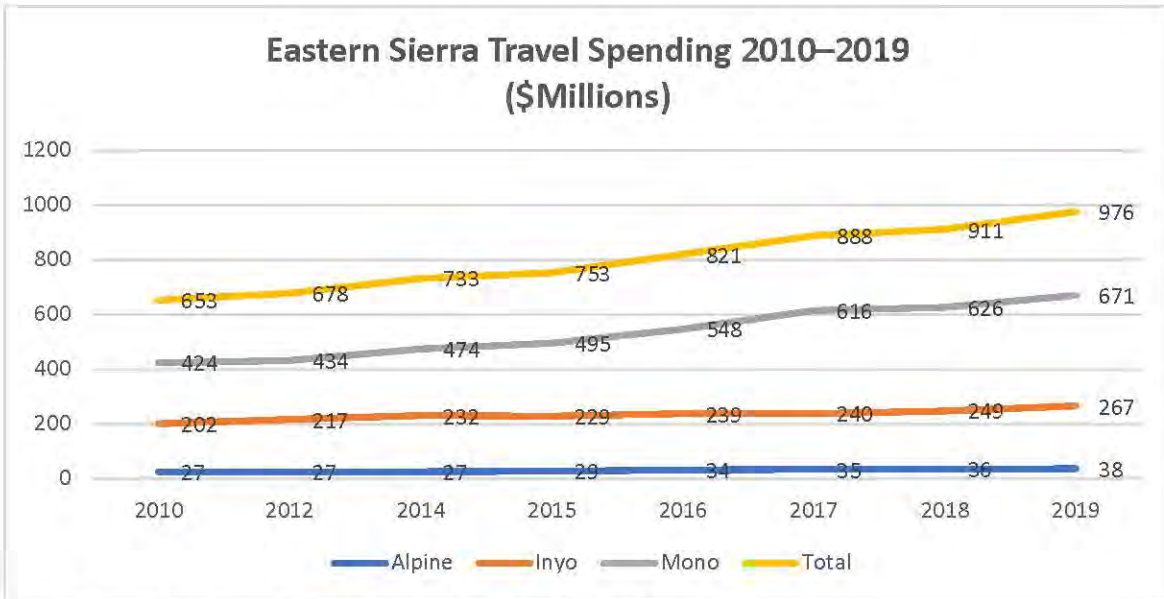
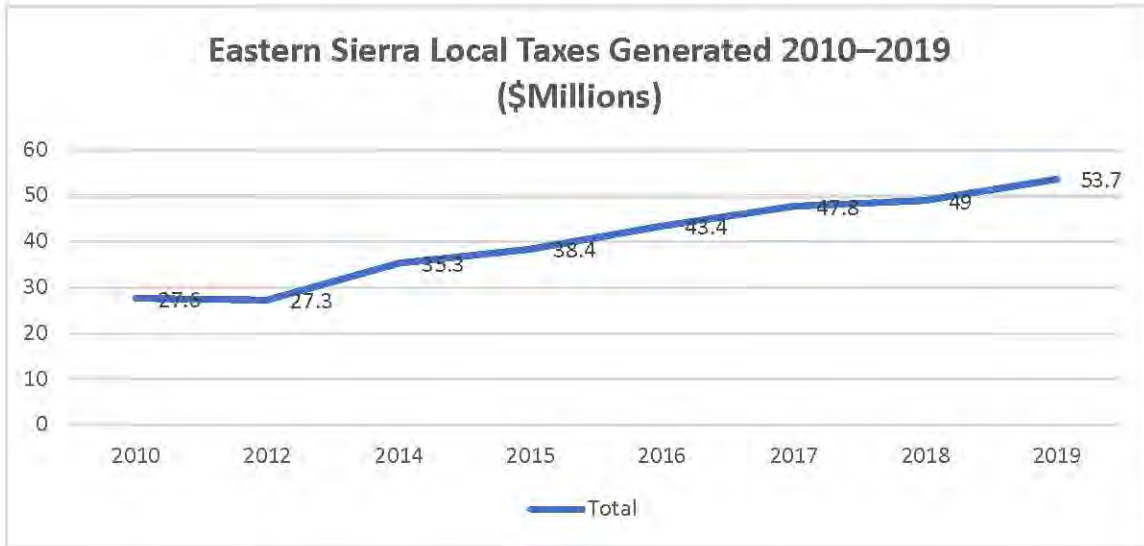California Travel Impacts by County 2010–2019, SMG Consulting

2. Employment

Tourism and travel spending generate approximately 9,200 jobs in the Eastern Sierra. The job-growth trend has kept pace with travel spending.

Eastern Sierra Tourism Industry Employment 2010–2019
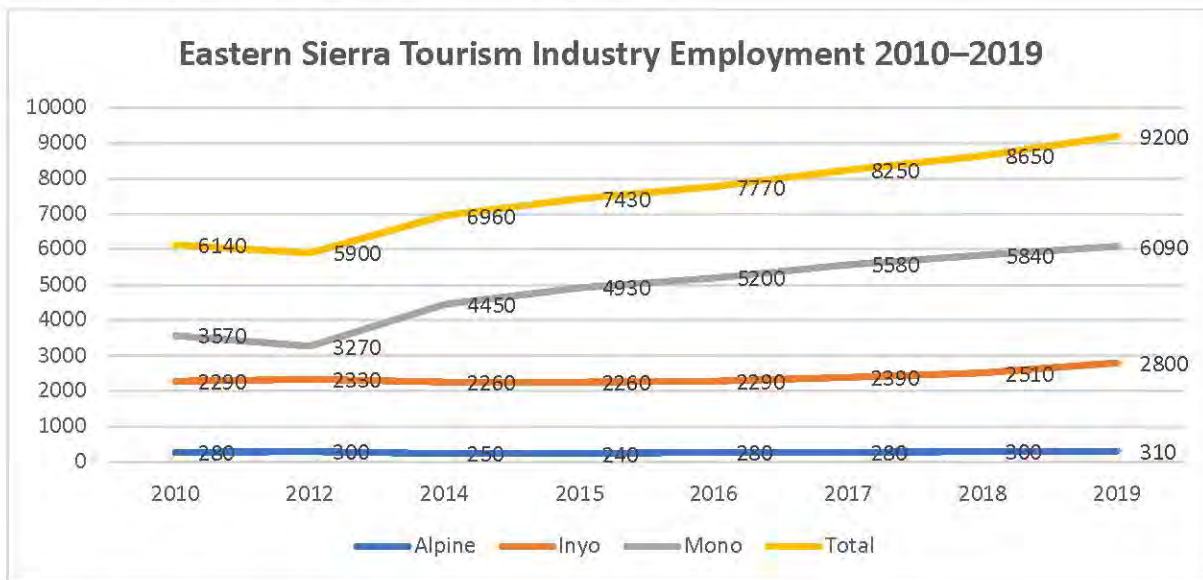
California Travel Impacts by County 2010–2019, SMG Consulting

3. Local Taxes

Combined Eastern Sierra visitors and tourism-related businesses generate approximately $53.7 million in local taxes annually.

Eastern Sierra Local Taxes Generated 2010–2019 ($Millions)

California Travel Impacts by County 2010–2019, SMG Consulting

Travel spending in the region has not only increased in each of the counties over the last 10 years, but has also shifted within the region, **with Mono County seeing an increase in its share of visitor spending.**

2010 vs. 2019 Eastern Sierra Regional Travel Spending

County	2010 Spending ($ Millions)	%	2019 Spending ($ Millions)	%
Inyo	$202.0	30.93%	$267.0	27.4%
Alpine	$27.0	4.13%	$38.0	3.9%
Mono	$424.0	64.93%	$671.0	68.8%
Total	**$653.0**	**100.00%**	**$976.0**	**100.00%**

Source: California Travel Impacts by County 2010–2019, SMG Consulting

There can be no doubt about the importance of tourism to the economy of the Eastern Sierra. A key concern over the long term is maintaining a sustainable approach between visitation and the impact on the natural resources and the region's local culture.

Section 2: The Eastern Sierra: The Place

A. Transportation Access

The Eastern Sierra is accessed from the north and south from U.S. Highway 395 and from the east and west along several state highways. The region is also served by several general aviation airports and the Mammoth-Yosemite commercial airport in Mammoth Lakes. The Bishop Airport began commercial service in December 2021, which by will reduce the impact of bad-weather closures at the Mammoth-Yosemite Airport which created unreliable air transit.

The ultra-scenic Highway 395 is the Eastern Sierra's north-south transportation artery through the entire region (approximately 250 miles). Many sections are currently designated as a Scenic Route by the State of California, and many visitors are drawn to the region for scenic drives.

From an economic development and tourism perspective, the importance of Highway 395 cannot be overstated. The highway provides access to the Eastern Sierra and its local communities and connects to the recreational, historical, and geographic assets located throughout the region.

B. Intrinsic Qualities of the Eastern Sierra

Along the Highway 395 corridor through the Eastern Sierra, various intrinsic qualities (qualities a visitor feels when experiencing the region) exist and overlap, including cultural, historical, natural, recreational, and scenic qualities. Some examples include:
- Yosemite National Park: Highway 395 is the only Eastern Sierra highway to access Yosemite National Park, via Highway 120.
- Death Valley National Park: Highway 395 and State Routes 168 and 190 provide highway access to Death Valley National Park.
- Mono Lake: A world-renowned site for wildlife viewing, Mono Lake is an alkaline body of water along Highway 395 with natural tufa towers emerging from the water.
- The Alabama Hills: A scenic icon offering a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities, including hiking, camping, scenic drives, rock climbing, biking, horseback riding, and photography.
- Mount Whitney: The highest peak in the contiguous United States, at 14,505 feet.
- Mammoth Mountain Ski Area: One of North America's largest ski areas, offering alpine and Nordic skiing, snowboarding, and mountain biking.
- Mono Lake Vista Point at Conway Summit: Offers far-reaching views of the Mono Basin.
- Benton's West Portal View: Provides travelers a view of the Sierra Nevada range.
- Tioga Pass: Offers a panoramic view of the Mono Basin from the east entry of Yosemite National Park.
- Trails in the Eastern Sierra include winter and summer routes for motorized and non-motorized experiences, including hiking, mountain biking, skiing, snowmobiling, and motorcycle riding.
- Fishing in the Eastern Sierra provides a wide variety of opportunities for both fly and spin enthusiasts, including along world-class Blue Ribbon Waters.

C. The Eastern Sierra Experience Profile

The Eastern Sierra experience profile consists of four core elements: Scenic Beauty, Local Communities & Culture, Recreation, and Environment & Stewardship.

Diverse offerings within the region characterize the Eastern Sierra. It offers visitors and residents a wide variety of activities, culture, scenic beauty, and environment that together provide a unique opportunity that can be appreciated only by experiencing it. The following is an overview of this profile:

Scenic Beauty: The Highway 395 corridor provides visitors with some of the country's most incredible scenery. Whether the view is overlooking Mono Lake or the Sierra Nevada range at sunrise, locations from Inyo County to Alpine County offer visitors an opportunity not just to view and experience the region's natural beauty, but also to connect with the greater natural environment.

Local Communities & Culture: The Eastern Sierra provides travelers and visitors an opportunity to experience the local communities and their culture. Local communities offer various recreation, special events, arts, and cultural opportunities that differentiate one community from the next.

Recreation: The Eastern Sierra provides travelers and visitors with a variety of year-round recreational opportunities. No matter the season, the activity, or the skill level, the region enables participants to engage and recreate as they like in one of the country's most beautiful places. Visitors enjoy world-class hiking, horseback riding, rock climbing, wildlife viewing, fishing, skiing, and camping.

Environment & Stewardship: The Eastern Sierra provides an opportunity to educate visitors about the environment and their role in the stewardship and protection of the area's natural resources. Only through exposure to these resources can visitors gain the needed perspective on managing and protecting them. The region provides a unique opportunity to educate people and foster an intrinsic understanding to enjoy and protect the resources. The Visitor Connection Package targets this opportunity to communicate the importance of the environment and stewardship, along with the need for a sustainable approach to tourism and outdoor recreation, while visitors enjoy the awe-inspiring Sierra.

D. The Eastern Sierra Visitor Activity Participation

While no comprehensive visitor data for Inyo, Mono, and Alpine counties is available, the 2018 Mono County Profile of Mono Visitors & Economic Impact of Tourism shows that visitors participate in a wide variety of year-round outdoor recreation activities on both land and water.

Based on Mono County research information (collected before the COVID-19 pandemic), visitors participate in a wide variety of outdoor recreation activities year-round, both land- and water-based.

All Outdoor Activity Participation (Main Activity and Other Activity Combined)

| | Total Visitor | Season | | | | Annual Total | | | | | | | |
| | | Winter | Spring | Summer | Fall | Residence | | | Activities | | MC Lodging | | |
						CA	Other U.S.	Int'l	Hike	Fish	Hot/Mot/ Inn	Other paid	Camping
Base: Outdoor activities	553	155	123	139	136	363	132	58	298	199	143	159	118
Hiking	57.2%	21.1%	55.3%	79.8%	64.1%	56.4%	50.6%	78.0%	100.0%	55.4%	52.1%	54.2%	64.7%
Fishing	40.4%	3.5%	58.4%	46.9%	45.3%	49.1%	29.6%	3.8%	39.1%	100.0%	36.7%	45.9%	57.3%
Camping	21.4%	1.8%	18.9%	29.5%	31.8%	19.1%	32.4%	12.6%	27.6%	25.4%	9.3%	5.6%	54.2%
Photography	20.1%	13.3%	11.3%	16.9%	40.3%	19.0%	21.3%	25.1%	27.3%	16.2%	30.9%	12.7%	30.4%
Alpine Skiing - downhill	13.6%	51.8%	9.5%	0.2%	0.0%	14.8%	11.1%	10.3%	7.8%	3.0%	10.4%	22.0%	3.7%
Hot Springs	12.2%	9.8%	10.7%	15.6%	12.0%	12.7%	11.6%	10.5%	14.9%	13.7%	10.9%	9.5%	19.4%
Boating	10.1%	0.0%	22.1%	13.3%	1.7%	12.6%	4.9%	4.8%	12.7%	20.9%	2.9%	18.8%	11.5%
Activities with my/our dog	8.4%	1.8%	10.0%	10.9%	9.3%	8.8%	9.5%	2.7%	10.4%	14.2%	3.5%	7.3%	11.0%
Kayaking	7.2%	0.3%	5.7%	17.6%	2.2%	9.3%	4.0%	0.0%	11.8%	10.9%	2.7%	5.9%	13.4%
Snowboarding	7.1%	30.6%	2.4%	0.0%	0.0%	8.4%	5.8%	1.1%	2.8%	0.8%	4.3%	16.4%	1.3%
Mountain biking/racing	5.5%	0.5%	5.1%	8.5%	7.0%	5.9%	6.2%	1.6%	7.6%	10.2%	5.6%	5.9%	6.5%
Rock-climbing	5.2%	1.5%	7.6%	5.3%	5.8%	3.9%	10.9%	1.1%	8.1%	4.1%	2.9%	0.5%	11.3%
Off-road motor sports	4.9%	2.2%	7.3%	2.4%	7.9%	4.7%	6.6%	2.7%	2.8%	4.5%	5.9%	3.7%	3.1%
Bicycle riding/road cycling	4.6%	0.0%	4.6%	8.4%	4.1%	5.9%	2.2%	1.1%	6.4%	6.7%	4.0%	8.0%	1.6%
Nordic Skiing - cross-country/skating	4.3%	19.0%	0.6%	0.4%	0.0%	3.5%	8.7%	0.0%	2.2%	0.0%	1.9%	5.8%	1.0%
Bird watching	4.2%	0.5%	3.1%	4.2%	8.9%	5.2%	1.7%	2.8%	6.4%	5.8%	5.9%	1.5%	5.8%

Source: Mono County, Profile of Mono Visitors & Economic Impact of Tourism, 2018

Section 3: Peak Tourism and the Eastern Sierra: How Did We Get Here?

This strategy focuses on developing a forward-looking, sustainable approach to recreation in the Eastern Sierra that will accommodate predicted increases in visitation and mitigate impacts to natural resources. For that reason, it is essential to step back and consider the changing dynamics of travel and "peak tourism" in California.

A. About the California Tourism Market

California residents include three major population markets, known as the "Core California Market," composed of Southern California, Central California, and Northern California. In 2018, these markets, combined, totaled approximately 27 million residents. The Eastern Sierra's primary market originates from Southern California and accounts for 18 million residents. Overall, California has approximately 40 million residents, with the population projected to increase over the next 10 to 20 years. Additionally, the Eastern Sierra attracts visitors to a lesser degree from the Central Valley and Northern California, and, given airline access, attracts international visitors through the Los Angeles and Las Vegas airports.

Mono County Visitor Origination (Pre-COVID-19)

International 24%

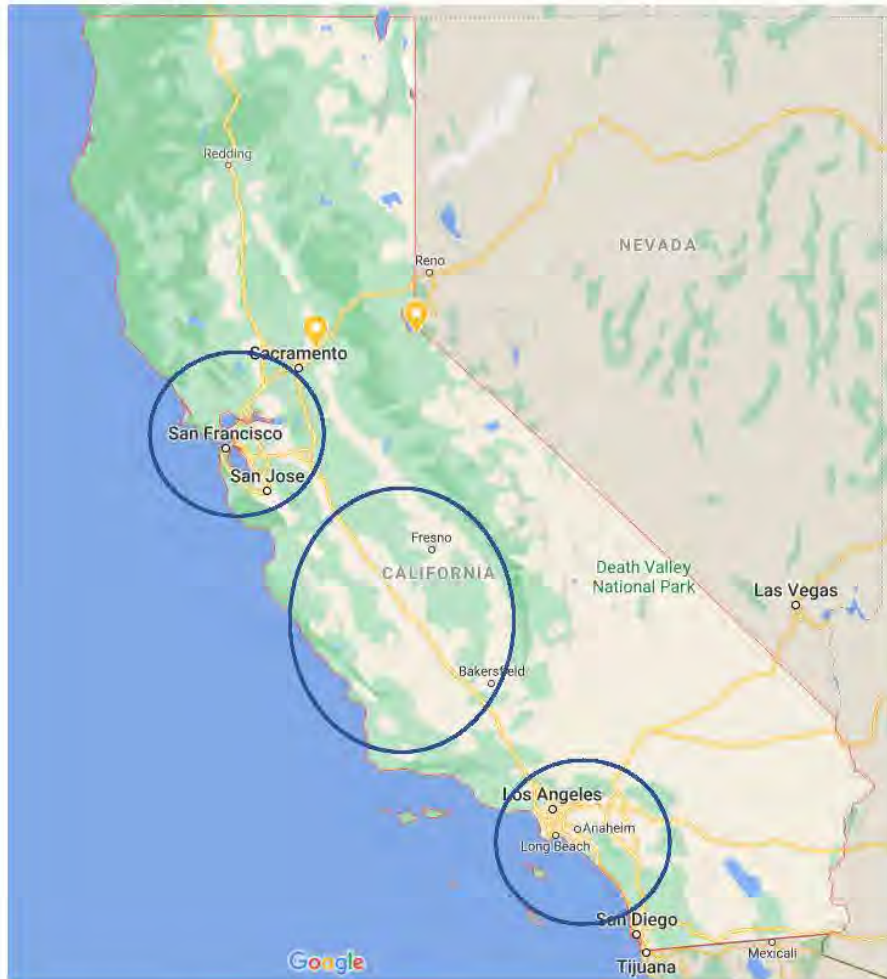California 48%

Other States 28%
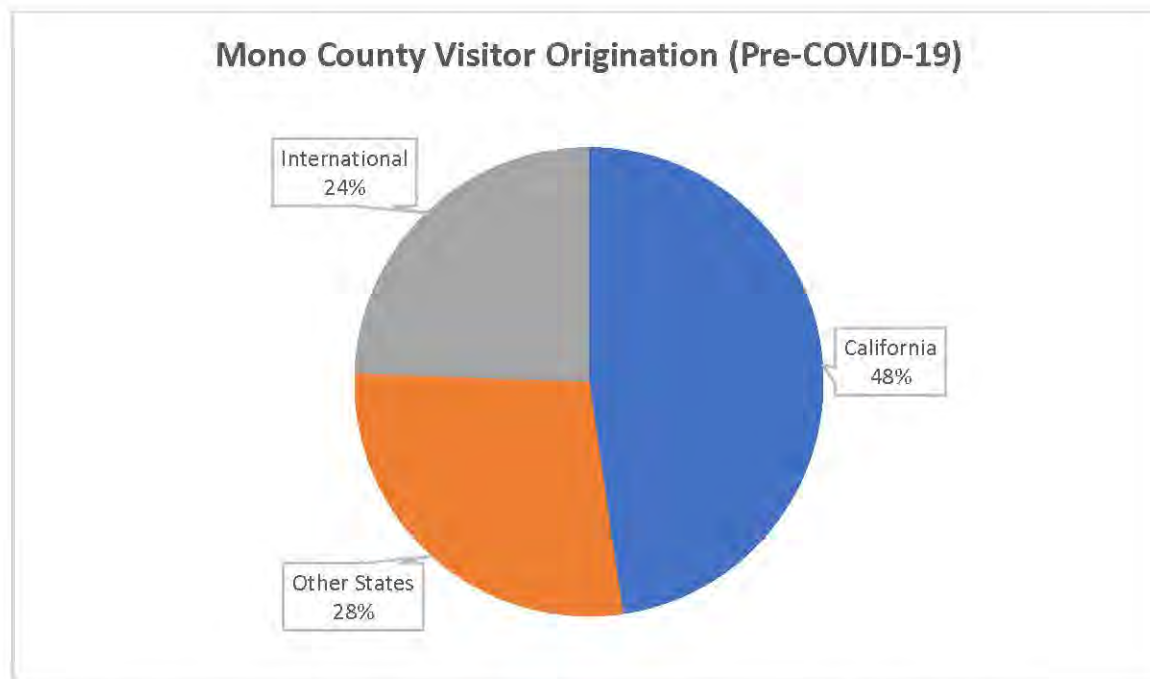
Source: Mono County, Profile of Mono Visitors & Economic Impact of Tourism, 2018

According to the same Mono County study, within California the primary source of visitation is from Southern California (61.6%), followed by Northern California (21.1%) and Central California (17.2%).

The Southern California market area is a crucial feeder market to the Eastern Sierra and drives the Eastern Sierra's tourism economy.

Primary Market Areas

The California Market Has Changed

Destinations throughout California have experienced significant visitation levels, and the effect of this peak visitation is continuing to increase in terms of both volume and resulting impact. Traffic, crowding, and congestion have impacted local communities, and, in the process, tourism promotion has become a key concern. In some cases, these resulting impacts have become politicized in local communities. It is also unknown what the impact of peak visitation will be on visitors themselves. The key is for destinations like the Eastern Sierra to understand destination crowding's potential repercussions and identify ways to mitigate the impact on natural resources and the local communities' experiences. Understanding how these changes have impacted destinations and visitor travel perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors is critical for sustainability and future success.

B. The Situational Drivers

Considering the current peak-travel situation that the Eastern Sierra is now facing, it's essential to step back and understand the forces driving this change and impacting not just the Eastern Sierra, but also destinations throughout California. Our analysis identifies three core forces of change driving the current peak-travel situation. These include the population growth in the California market, the solid post-recession economy, and the growth of Tourism Business Improvement Districts (TBIDS) as a destination-marketing funding model.

Three Forces of Change Impacting Peak Travel
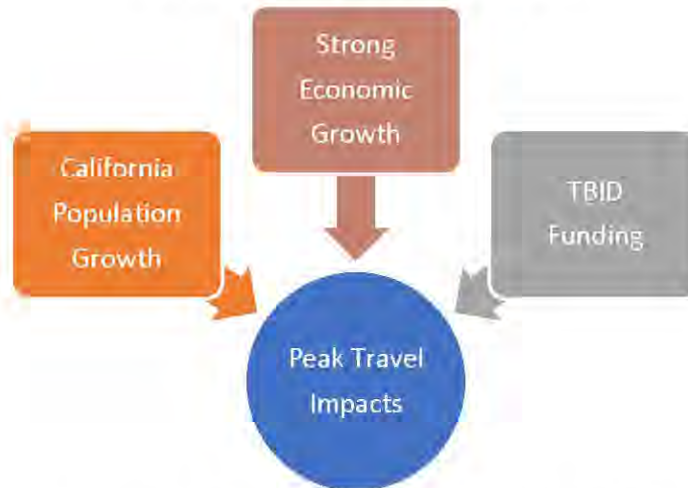
These three forces of change converging simultaneously have worked to produce a situation that tourism destinations have not seen before. To be sure, destinations have experienced traffic, crowding, and congestion at certain times during the year, but not for as long and as intensely as they are currently experiencing. Two of the forces, the California population and TBID funding, have been slowly growing for years. Catalyzed by a national and state economic boom, travel destinations are now experiencing peak numbers of visitors.

The Impact of COVID-19

In addition to these core situational drivers, 2020 saw the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, which dramatically changed visitation behavior throughout the state. While social distancing became a key mitigation measure, it had the unintended consequence of spiking visitor demand in outdoor locations away from dense urban populations. The Eastern Sierra received much of that visitation. As visitation to the Eastern Sierra increased, it attracted not only those who had visited previously, but also those who had never visited and were unfamiliar with guidelines and best practices for enjoying outdoor locations. The result was an increased impact on the natural resources, highlighting the increased need for visitor education. The COVID-19 pandemic offered a unique opportunity to reframe how Eastern Sierra destinations connect with visitors.

California Population Growth

One of the most impactful forces of change is the growth of the California population. This dynamic has two important elements: California's population has reached its highest yet, at 40 million, and the

population has concentrated in centers near and accessible to tourism destinations like the Eastern Sierra. The figure below illustrates California's overall growth from 1960 and where it currently stands, at 39.3 million people.
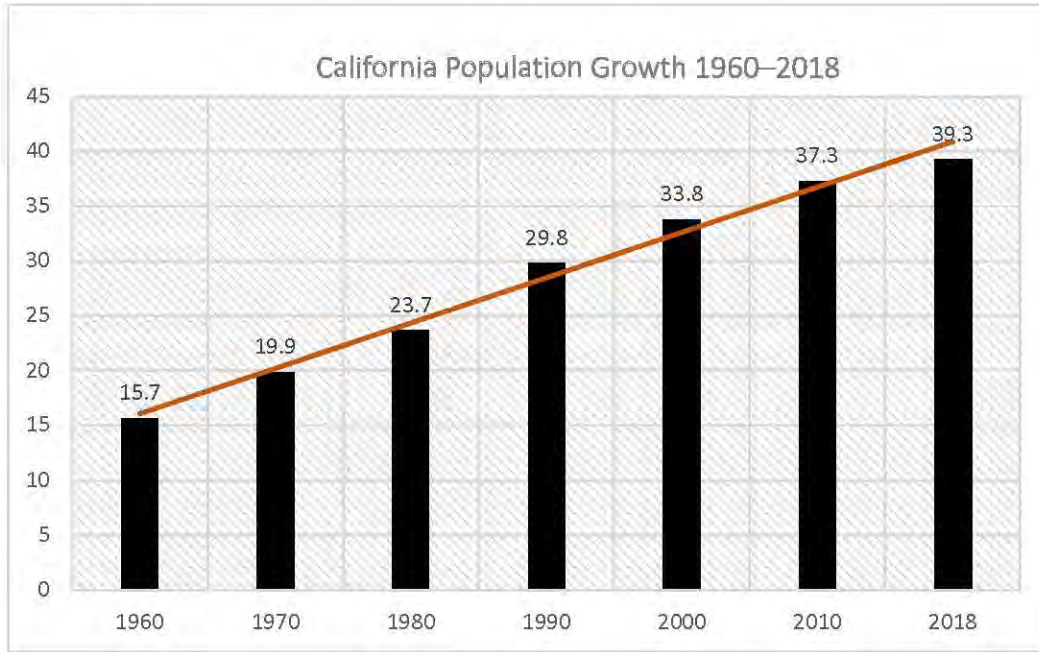
California is a large state with a significant population and the fifth-largest economy in the world. Without corresponding increases in access capacity (roads, parking, etc.), the state's overall growth has contributed to the traffic, congestion, and crowding at destinations.

California's population has concentrated in four large Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs):

Metropolitan Statistical Areas 2018 Population Estimates

Metropolitan Statistical Area	2018 Population
Bay Area: San Jose, San Francisco, Oakland	4,729,484
Greater Los Angeles: Los Angeles, Long Beach, Anaheim	18,788,800
Sacramento: Sacramento, Roseville, Arden, Arcade	2,482,660
San Diego: San Diego, Chula Vista, Carlsbad	3,095,313

Source: U.S. Census

These four regions account for approximately 72% of the California population. Los Angeles, in particular, has achieved "Mega City" status, with approximately 18.7 million people in the greater region. With all of this population growth concentrated in four regions, tremendous pressure is put on tourism destinations within a two-hour drive of these MSAs. California's population is projected to grow to 44.1 million by 2030, just nine short years, and will continue to compound issues like crowding and access.[1]

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[1] Public Policy Institute of California

Strong Economic Growth

A second force impacting peak travel is the strong economy. A scant dozen years ago (2008), the country was mired in a recession that significantly impacted tourism. This situation has changed dramatically. The tourism industry's key economic indicators are Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth, personal-income growth, low inflation, and low unemployment. When these indicators are positive, it creates an economic environment that is conducive to and enables travel.

Selected U.S. Economic Indicators (Year-Over-Year Change)

	2017	2018	2019
	% Δ	% Δ	% Δ
Gross Domestic Product (GDP)	2.2	2.9	2.3
Personal-Income Growth	4.4	4.5	4.2
Unemployment	4.4	3.9	3.6
Consumer Price Index (CPI)	2.1	2.4	2.9

Source: California Department of Finance

As can be seen, the indicators above reflect a powerful and robust U.S. economy. Strong GDP growth, which has exceeded 3% some quarters, coupled with solid personal-income growth, low inflation, and low unemployment, has the national economy in a robust position and has been reflected in the strong demand for tourism in California.

Tourism Funding

A third driving force impacting peak travel has been the dramatic increase in tourism promotion funding made available by the creation of Tourism Business Improvement Districts (TBIDs). According to Civitas, a key player in the formation of Tourism Business Improvement Districts, there are now 110 TBIDs in California generating approximately $284 million in tourism promotion funds.

The effect of this cash infusion has been twofold: Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) promoting tourism have more available capital, and destinations that previously had no funding for tourism promotion now have available funding. This increase in tourism promotion has increased demand for visitation throughout California.

The infusion of marketing capital created a subtle but essential change in program accountability. With the collection of TBID funds through destination lodging properties, accountability shifted from more passive city councils and county supervisors, who in many cases were not equipped to judge the effectiveness of tourism programs, to a group (often boards of directors with hoteliers) with a keen understanding of marketing looking for clear evidence of a return on investment (ROI).

This subtle but significant change in funding enabled DMOs to find success advertising to regional feeder markets within a two- or three-hour drive of their destination. These markets had experienced significant California population growth and were enjoying a stable economy. This marketing focus had several important impacts: Not only did DMOs drive the number of visitors overall, but visitors tended to be weekenders and day-trippers rather than weeklong vacationers. Tourism increased significantly, to

the point that traffic on the way to, around, and on the way home from destinations increased dramatically. Residents in many destinations have protested the increase in weekend traffic. In some cases, DMOs have lost public-sector funding for promotional efforts as public priorities have shifted.

While additional elements contribute to peak travel, California's strong economy, population growth, and increased tourism marketing have played a significant role in the current situation.

The Impact on the Eastern Sierra

The Eastern Sierra is experiencing all-time-high visitation levels, and the impact of this peak visitation is predicted to increase.

The resulting traffic, crowding, and congestion have impacted local communities, leading them to voice concern about tourism promotion. Likewise, some visitors have expressed frustration with finding lodging and accessing recreation on public lands.

The region's success as an outdoor recreation market depends on its ability to mitigate the impact of crowding on natural resources and communities' experiences. Understanding how these changes have impacted destinations and visitor travel perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors is critical for the economic, environmental, and social sustainability of the region.

The impact on the Eastern Sierra can be summarized as follows:

- The Eastern Sierra has significant increases in visitation throughout the region and increasing demand for recreation in semi-densely populated and dispersed areas.
- As with increased visitation and demand for recreation activities, the Eastern Sierra has experienced impacts on the natural environment resulting in overall environmental degradation and diminished recreation experiences. Examples include increased trash, crowding, parking in off-limits locations, erosion, human waste, and wear and tear on the natural environment.
- Resident pushback regarding some visitor behavior, as well as access to areas that residents have primarily enjoyed in the past, has brought more political pressure on city and county government.
- With the short- and long-term prospects for continued population growth in the Eastern Sierra's feeder markets, and increasing demand for outdoor experiences and activities, the current tourism model may be unsustainable. To outline a program to support sustainable recreation-based tourism, the Visitor Connection Package frames a regional approach to connect with the visitor audience and educate them on stewardship in the Eastern Sierra.

Section 4: The Visitor Connection Strategy Overview

The Visitor Connection Strategy recognizes that visitation patterns in the Eastern Sierra have changed. There is a need to respond on a regional and collaborative basis.

1. Visitor Connection Strategy Assumptions

The strategy was developed with explicit assumptions, including:

1. *The Eastern Sierra Visitor Connection Strategy will be based on the concept of sustainability and focused on educating visitors about the area and protecting the environment.*

    The Visitor Connection Strategy considers residents' needs and the concept of sustainability, but primarily focuses on visitors.

2. *Those developing and implementing the strategy will focus on long-term improvements in visitor engagement.*

    Not enough can be stated about the importance of long-term vision. The Visitor Connection Strategy is developed with a view to the long term and guides in the near term for both the public- and private-sector partners. While it is important to implement short-term tactical programs, efforts that focus solely on the short term become reactive and lose sight of the long-term strategies designed to bring about positive changes by visitors engaging in the natural environment.

3. *The Strategy will be developed by organizations implementing the Package.*

This assumption is essential, particularly in the diverse Eastern Sierra region, where all organizations are critical in implementing the Visitor Connection Strategy. The Visitor Connection Strategy partner organizations, made up of 28 representatives of regional organizations including DMOs and recreation user groups, worked collaboratively to develop an impactful and sustainable message for the Eastern Sierra's audience and environment.

2. Visitor Connection Strategy Framework

The visitor connection framework consists of three elements: understanding the current opportunity, creating a strategy, and transforming the created strategy into implementation   steps leading to on-the-ground achievements.

During eight workshops, participants from Eastern Sierra partner organizations worked through each step to develop the complete Visitor Connection Package.

3. Guiding Principles

The following guiding principles were developed for the Visitor Connection Program:

GUIDING PRINCIPLES
THE VISITOR CONNECTION PROGRAM SHOULD:

- Focus on stewardship education and the celebration of local culture.
- Be reliable, implementable, and forward thinking.
- Utilize informed and collaborative decision-making.
- Employ a phased approach to develop tools and capacity.
- Leverage existing communication assets to engage visitors throughout their "sequence of encounter."
- Not compete with existing efforts in the region.

Section 5: The Visitor Connection Strategy Plan

Part 1: Understanding

1.1 The Problem/Opportunity Statement

The first step in developing the Visitor Connection Strategy was to understand the challenges and opportunities facing outdoor recreation in the Eastern Sierra. Peak tourism in the Eastern Sierra has added strain to natural resources, public access, land management, and community relations. Visitors find it difficult to navigate complex land-management jurisdictions when planning where to go and stay. Continuously changing campground and trail closures related to wildfires and COVID-19 have compounded the confusion.

OPPORTUNITY STATEMENT

By working together as a network of regional organizations, we strive to leverage sought-after recreation experiences in the Eastern Sierra and emotional connections to the region for the purpose of preparing and educating both visitors and residents to embody a respectful mindset, promote visitor dispersion, and motivate stewardship behaviors, directly contributing to the sustainability of natural resources and gateway communities.

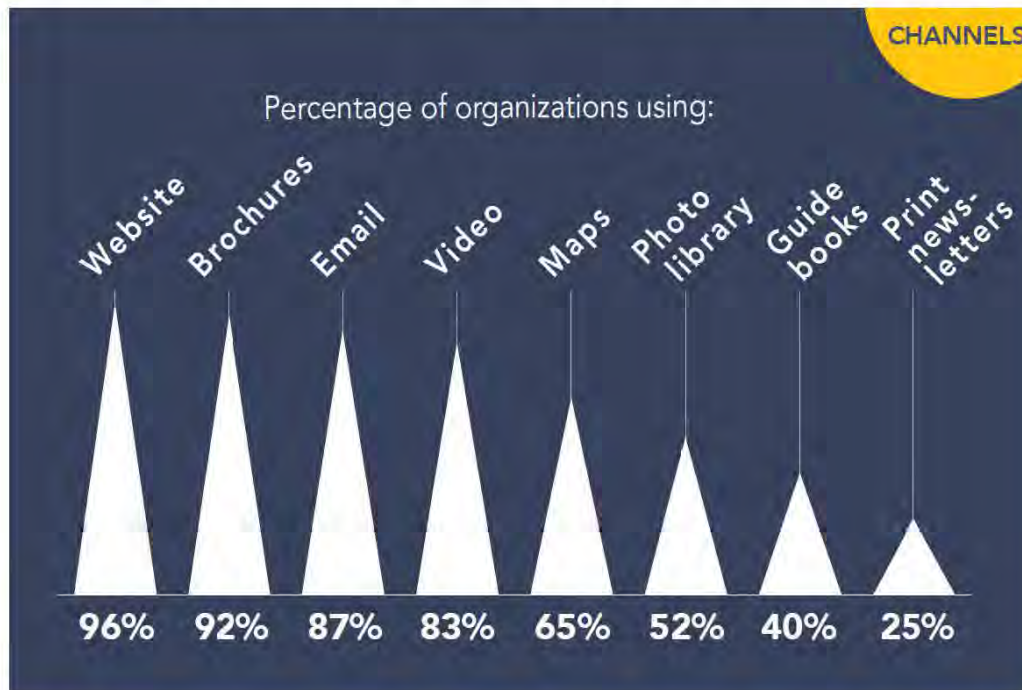Source: Connection to the Eastern Sierra Visitor Audience, Meeting 4

It should be noted that three of the identified opportunities are focused on visitors, including changing visitor mindsets, educating visitors, and creating sustainability with visitors and the natural environment. The fourth opportunity is focused on the working partnership and collaboration among partners. The problems and opportunities serve as a basis for developing and guiding the Visitor Connection Strategy.

1.2 Regional Organization Outreach and Communication Asset Review

An integral part of the Visitor Connection Strategy is leveraging the supporting partner organizations' communication assets to benefit the partnership's reach in providing transparent and consistent stewardship messaging. Partner organizations have a combined audience reach of:

➢ 8 million direct in-person interactions with the public per year
➢ 31 million webpage views per year
➢ 1.2 million Facebook followers
➢ 650,000 Instagram followers
➢ 194,000 Twitter followers
➢ 54,000 Pinterest followers
➢ 637,000 email newsletter subscribers
➢ 34,000 print newsletter subscribers

The combined partnership organizations reach their audiences with various marketing tools. About 63% of partners currently use their messaging and special events to promote stewardship.

Source: Connection to the Eastern Sierra Visitor Audience, Meeting 7

The partnership has a robust opportunity for visitor messaging with the combined impact of all of its communication elements, including partner assets, partner tools, and organizational support. These combined elements create an opportunity to leverage all of these individual efforts into a cohesive and focused approach to connect with the visitor audience.

Partner Assets/Tools Communication Model

Partner Assets

Connection to the Visitor

Partner Tools

Organizational Support
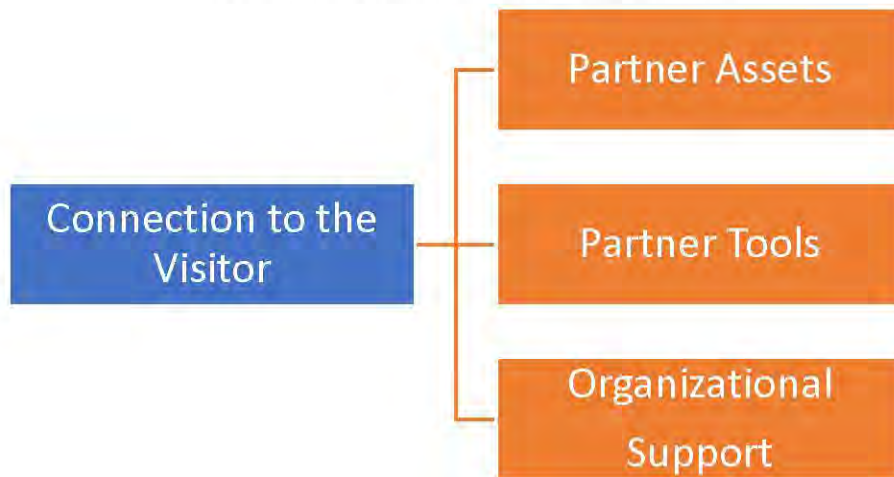
Source: SMG Consulting

The model consists of three elements:

1. Existing partner assets include large audiences of potential and actual visitors.

2. Individual partner tools can distribute stewardship messaging developed by the partnership.

3. Organizational support provides two key elements: new ideas and innovations in messaging and long-term commitment to the programs.

This model leverages existing assets and tools of individual partners to promote a focused message for the region. The needed messaging can be spread only through the collective action of the partners; no one partner can be as effective as the whole group.

Part 2: Creating

2.1 The Eastern Sierra Visitor Persona

The target market is focused not on the demographics of visitors, but rather on a visitor persona.

"Personas…represent a user type that might use your service, product, site, or brand similarly—creating personas assists in understanding potential users' needs, experiences, behaviors, and goals.

"Creating personas helps recognize that different people have different needs and expectations and identify with the Eastern Sierra user the Visitor Connection Package is being developed for. The following persona is designed to guide the strategy's ideation processes, and they can help the Eastern Sierra to achieve the goal of creating [an] effective stewardship messaging program."[2]

PERSONA: THE EASTERN SIERRA VISITOR

This person is motivated by the enjoyment and experience of time spent outside, regardless of whether they are exploring for the first time or going the distance to be distanced.

This visitor balances their personal ways of connecting to the outdoors with community- or family-oriented activities. This includes a wide variety of outdoor activities and ways of accessing them.

They seek out beautiful and unique natural resources throughout the region.

This visitor sees the Eastern Sierra as a special place where they seek connection to the land, family, friends, ancestors, history, tradition, or themselves. The importance of these experiences compels them to leave their regular environment and spend their time, energy, and money in this pursuit.

While this person looks for connection in ways that are specific to them, they may or may not be aware of the complex history of the region or the realities and experiences of other visitors and local residents.

They expect to be able to re-create their positive experiences in the Eastern Sierra, and that the Eastern Sierra will always be here for them.

Source: Connection to the Eastern Sierra Visitor Audience, Meeting 7

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[2] Sang 2021

2.2 Eastern Sierra Messaging Objectives

The Eastern Sierra messaging objectives are designed to maximize the opportunities that have been identified previously. They include the following:

1. Support organizations' existing stewardship messages.

2. Leverage the power of Eastern Sierra marketing channels.

3. Leverage the financial resources of the Eastern Sierra for message reach.

4. Create awareness for the Eastern Sierra stewardship message.

5. Educate potential visitors on stewardship practices.

6. Measure the effectiveness of messaging efforts.

2.3 The Messaging Strategy

The messaging strategy comprises two elements: a micro model and a macro model. The micro model uses the partnership's existing tools to reach potential visitors, and the macro model can be used to support partner message outreach and create a unified message and resource for the region. The purpose of the macro model is to support the partner organizations and not compete with them.

A. Micro Model

The micro model takes advantage of partner organizations' existing communication tools (previously identified) and leverages those resources with Eastern Sierra message content. The macro model will develop appropriate messages and tools and make them available to the partners for inclusion in their existing efforts.

Micro Model

Eastern Sierra Visitors
Eastern Sierra Stewardship Message
Alabama Hills Stewardship Group, Alpine County, CA State Parks-Mono Lake Tufa SNR, Eastern Sierra 4x4 Club, Eastern Sierra Conservation Corps, Eastern Sierra Interpretive Association, Friends of the Inyo, etc.

Source: SMG Consulting

B. Macro Model

Focus on Driving the Website and Influencing Potential Visitors

Given the prominent role that the internet plays in travel planning, the Eastern Sierra's communication efforts should drive potential visitors to a regional website to be developed under the Visitor Connection Package.

At the core of the website strategy are two basic principles:

- The best organizations to connect with the visitor are individual partner organizations that are closest to the visitor. They can connect and present a stewardship message.
- An organization to create tools to make available to the partners would need to be developed. The formation of this organization is a recommendation of this strategy.

How the strategy works (see the model on the following page):

- Communications programs (advertising, SEO, social media, public relations) drive visitors to an Eastern Sierra regionwide portal website.
- Once visitors go to the Eastern Sierra portal website, they will be presented with a range of stewardship information relevant to the region and their trip, as well as an opportunity to connect with any of the partner websites. It is important to reach the potential visitor early in their travel-planning journey with targeted stewardship messaging because they may not return to the portal website.
- A potential visitor may decide to visit as a day or overnight visitor. Based upon their experience, new visitors either do or do not become repeat visitors. They may not come back to the portal site and are likely to go to a DMO website, a lodging website, an attraction website, a land-manger website, or other websites, going back to the lodging property/attraction directly or back to the website to choose another lodging property or attraction, or they may fall out of the entire system.

Eastern Sierra Stewardship
Messaging Strategy

Eastern Sierra and Organization Messaging

Advertising/Branding/Promotions • SEO • Digital Marketing • Social Media • Public Relations • Sales • Content Development • Publications

Target Segments/Personas

Geographic • Demographic • Seasonal • Reason to Visit

Eastern Sierra Website(s)

Influence website visitors with stewardship message

Become a Day or Overnight Visitor

Property Direct • Online Travel Agent • Other

Destination Experience

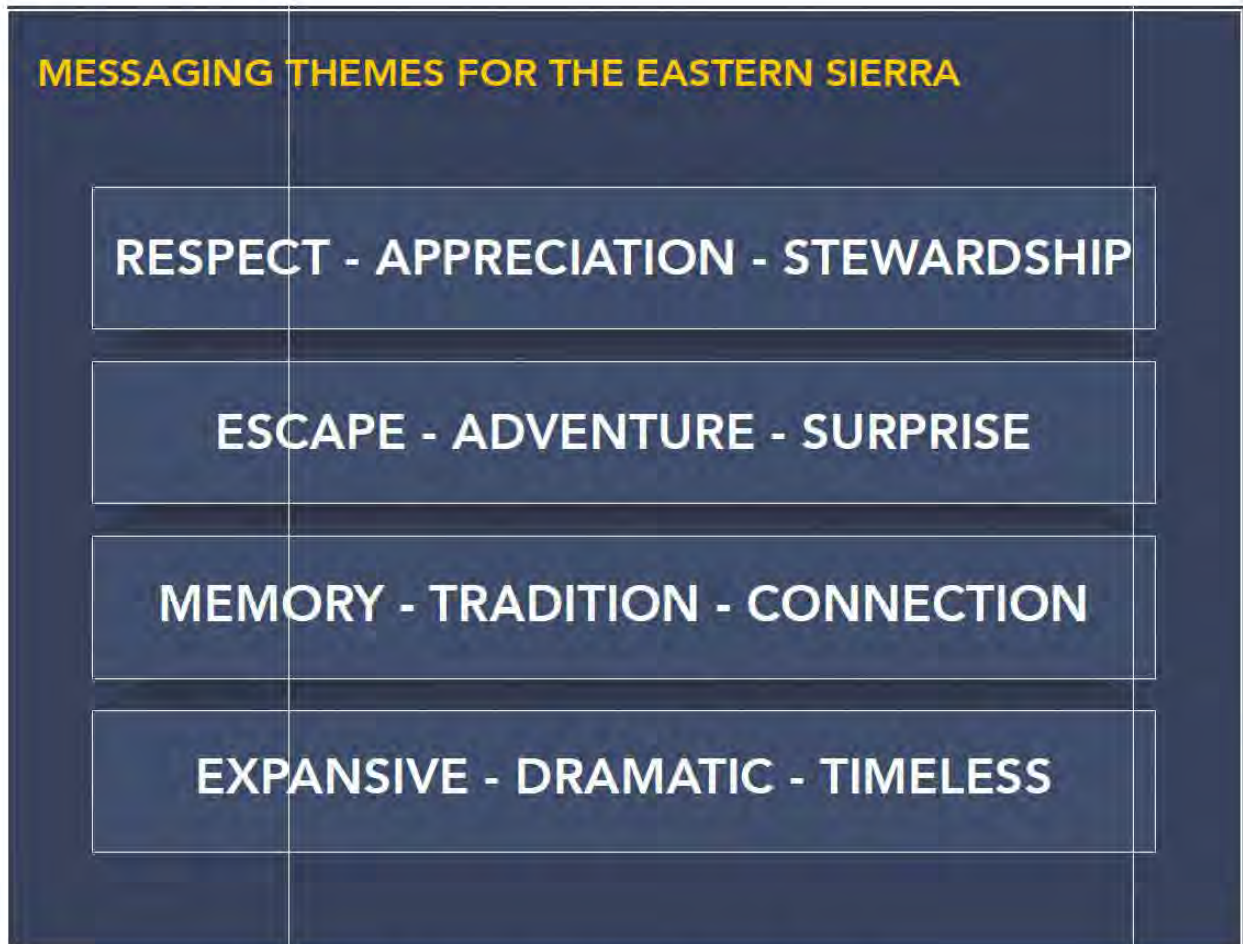Destination Experience Stewardship Behavior

Source: SMG Consulting

2.4 Messaging Themes

In developing stewardship messaging, it is essential to be authentic and transparent and tell the Eastern Sierra's story and its importance for future generations. To that end, the following message themes and photos have been selected to guide future messaging created for the Eastern Sierra.

A. Eastern Sierra Themes

As identified in the Visitor Connection Package, "These themes will provide a strong foundation for the development of sustainable-recreation messaging campaigns to connect with the Eastern Sierra visitor audience using an authentic and unified regional voice." The themes represent four defining pillars of the Eastern Sierra that residents have and help define a sense of place. They were developed and discussed by the working group.

Eastern Sierra Themes

MESSAGING THEMES FOR THE EASTERN SIERRA

RESPECT - APPRECIATION - STEWARDSHIP

ESCAPE - ADVENTURE - SURPRISE

MEMORY - TRADITION - CONNECTION

EXPANSIVE - DRAMATIC - TIMELESS

Source: Connection to the Eastern Sierra Visitor Audience, Meeting 7

Sense of Place

"In general, sense of place describes our relationship with places, expressed in various dimensions of human life: emotions, biographies, imagination, stories, and personal experiences (Basso, 1996). In environmental psychology, the sense of place—how we perceive a place— includes place attachment and place meaning (Kudryavtsev, Stedman, and Krasny, 2012).

"Place attachment reflects a bond between people and places, and place meaning reflects symbolic meanings people ascribe to places. In short, 'sense of place is the lens through which people experience

and make meaning of their experiences in and with the place' (Adams, 2013). Sense of place varies among people, in history, and throughout one's lifetime (http://www.placeness.com).

"People may attribute various meanings to the same place in relation to its ecological, social, economic, cultural, aesthetic, historical, or other aspects. Sense of place evolves through personal experiences, and defines how people view, interpret, and interact with their world (Russ et al., 2015)."

B. Visualizing the Eastern Sierra

As part of messaging, visualizing the Eastern Sierra helps capture the Eastern Sierra's feel as a place. The group members selected these photos to capture the Eastern Sierra's sense of place.

See Appendix for image credits

Part 3: Transforming

In this phase, we focus on transforming and implementing the Visitor Connection Strategy for the Eastern Sierra. This includes tools and related action steps for implementation, and organization to provide the necessary infrastructure to implement the Visitor Connection Strategy.

A. Tools and Action Steps

Phase 1

Source: Connection to the Eastern Sierra Visitor Audience, Meeting 7

Phase 2

VISITOR CONNECTION PROGRAM

GROUP'S RECOMMENDED TOOLS & CHANNELS

Website Upgrades

On-the-Ground Programs
    Local Host and Ranger Programs
    Out-of-Region Ambassador Partnerships

Analog Collateral
    Regionally Coordinated Map Series
    FAQ Handheld Product
    Posters/Flyers
    Business Card directing visitors to
        landing page and stewardship message

Expand Digital Collateral
    Strategic digital ad buys
    Toolkit expansion

ACTION PLAN

Secure funding for Phase II

Website upgrades made as required

Work with Advisory Committee and local organizations to develop on-the-ground priority programs

Create content for analog collateral, oversee production, coordinate distribution

Create additional digital collateral to be determined by Phase I Strategic Plan. Recommendations include video, radio ads, podcast, ad buys, and additional turnkey graphics

Ongoing research to better understand visitation audience and maximize messaging efficacy

Phase I ongoing:
    Continued management
    Review and refine program elements

PHASE I   PHASE II   PHASE III   PROGRAM NEEDS

PHASE III
PHASE II
PHASE I
VISITOR CONNECTION PROGRAM

Source: Connection to the Eastern Sierra Visitor Audience, Meeting 7

Phase 3

Source: Connection to the Eastern Sierra Visitor Audience, Meeting 7

B. Organizational Structure

The organizational structure includes two essential elements: where the Visitor Connection Package fits in the mix of regional organizations, and how the effort will be organized to operate and implement programs.

1. Regional Fit

In finding a place where this effort fits regionally, it is essential to consider which organization can most effectively host and/or manage the Visitor Connection Package and which organizational structure has the capacity to acquire grant funding and provide accountability. The most likely fit would be within the Eastern Sierra Council of Governments (ESCOG), given the regional nature of the Visitor Connection Package. The ESCOG is a joint powers authority that includes the City of Bishop, the Town of Mammoth Lakes, Inyo County, and Mono County. The ESCOG has the authority to apply for and administer grant funding and execute programming about sustainable recreation, like the Visitor Connection Package.

SUSTAINABLE RECREATION & TOURISM INITIATIVE

Eastern Sierra Council of Governments

City of Bishop, Town of Mammoth Lakes, Inyo County, Mono County

Visitor Connection
Package

2. Visitor Connection Package Organization

It is critical to develop the necessary organizational structure to carry out the Visitor Connection Package's programs and meet the region's needs.
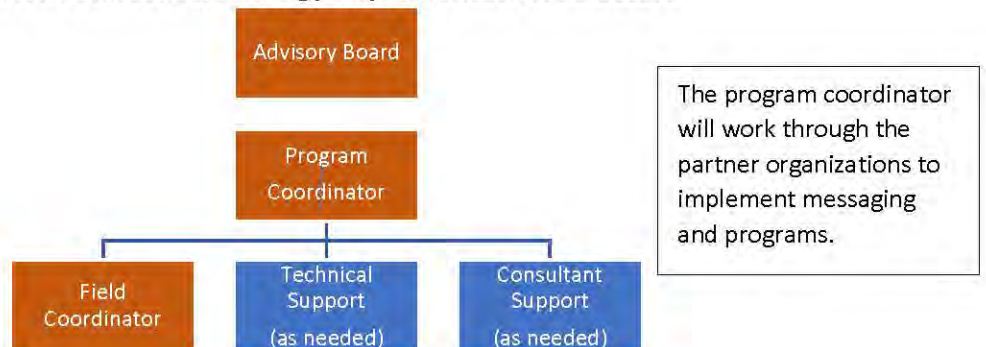
Membership

- The Visitor Connection Package will need to determine if the organization tasked with developing the macro strategy is member-based or open to all. Will there be a cost to be involved? What are the inclusion criteria?

Operating Structure

- Advisory board: An advisory committee will oversee the strategy's management and implementation. (Membership on that committee will need to be determined.)
- Partner community organizations: The effort will need to identify a comprehensive list of organizations that can help inform and implement the program.
- Management of the Visitor Connection Strategy: The organization will need operational structure to drive implementation.

Visitor Connection Strategy Implementation Structure

Advisory Board

Program
Coordinator

Field
Coordinator

Technical
Support
(as needed)

Consultant
Support
(as needed)

The program coordinator will work through the partner organizations to implement messaging and programs.

The goal is not to create an organization that duplicates efforts among existing private- and public-sector organizations, but instead to leverage the efforts that already exist and to coordinate new

initiatives the members develop. As such, the organization can be managed at least on a starting basis with a part-time program coordinator who provides day-to-day management that reports to the Advisory Board, and a part-time field-support person who would work directly with partner organizations in implementing programs. The core staff could be supplemented when needed with appropriate consultants and technical-support staff.
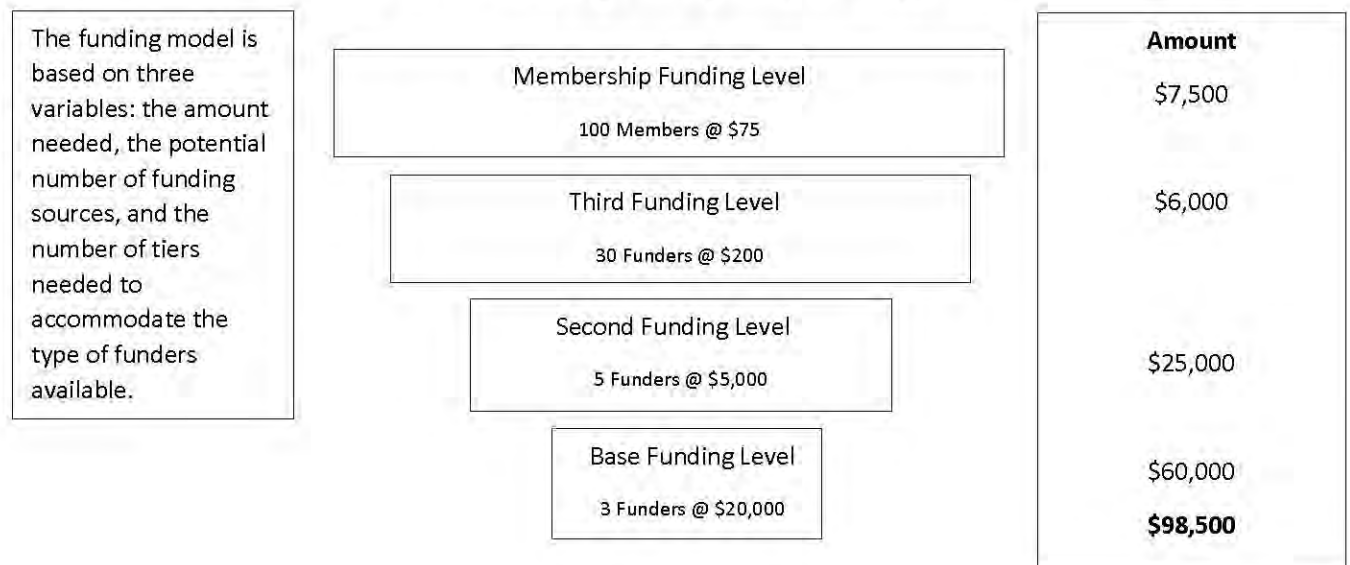
The success of the organization is based on the following:

1. The organization must focus on doing for the region what each individual organization cannot do on its own. That is to say, the organization must stay focused on leveraging existing member efforts and coordinating new member initiatives. It is important to resist duplication of efforts. The three phases outlined above will form the basis for the organization's progress.

2. The organization must be as lean as possible so funding supporters know that maximum dollars are going toward the program objectives, building confidence in and sustainable support for the organization.

3. The organization must have defined and measurable goals that support the organization's objectives. Long-term funding will be incumbent on meeting the objectives.

Funding

There is a need to develop a phased budget for implementation with commitments from the membership to a sustained funding level to execute the strategy. The funding model calls for a tiered approach to allow partners to support the effort with different levels of funding. The funding model below is presented as a conceptual model of how different levels of funding and the number of participants can be adjusted based on the funding amount needed and the number of participants. For example, an approximate $100,000 operating budget could be developed in the following way. Funding partners will benefit from turnkey content and regional information resources.

Potential Funding Model (Conceptual Only)

The funding model is based on three variables: the amount needed, the potential number of funding sources, and the number of tiers needed to accommodate the type of funders available.	Funding Level	Amount
	Membership Funding Level 100 Members @ $75	$7,500
	Third Funding Level 30 Funders @ $200	$6,000
	Second Funding Level 5 Funders @ $5,000	$25,000
	Base Funding Level 3 Funders @ $20,000	$60,000 **$98,500**

In addition to the funding model above, the organization can supplement its budget with other sources of funding:

- Grants: The organization should identify appropriate grants for specific projects.
- Specific project underwriting: Depending upon the project, there may be specific funding available from corporate and government sponsors. This might include unique research projects, exhibitions, panel discussions, etc.
- Annual fundraiser: Develop an annual fundraiser that celebrates the Eastern Sierra's culture and communities.
- Retail sales: Sell low-risk retail products, such as Eastern Sierra stickers and a photo series.

Conclusion

The Visitor Connection Strategy is a unique opportunity to address a significant challenge in the Eastern Sierra by working cooperatively to leverage the assets of a variety of organizations in three different counties. Over the long term, this effort can also serve as a blueprint for other issues that may arise. To not fully engage and address the identified issues would be a missed opportunity for the region.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Photo Credits

Kneeling: Shmuel Thaler/*Santa Cruz Sentinel*
Trail work: Friends of the Inyo
Black-and-white bristlecone: Sean Bagshaw, outdoorexposurephoto.com
Jumping person: Connie Terry
Ice swimming: Christian Pondella, christianpondella.com
Night sky: Michael Ver Sprill, dreamstime.com
Adaptive outing: Chelsea Taylor
Fishing: Town of Mammoth Lakes
Native American baskets: *Nevada Magazine*
Dust storm: Great Basin Unified Air Pollution Control District
Organized historic artifacts: NPS photo/Tom Alex
Bristlecone sunset: Neutronman, dreamstime.com

PROGRAM COMPONENT/CHANNELS		ACTION PLAN FROM VISITOR CONNECTION PROGRAM
Advisory Committee & Strategic Plan for Program Implementation		Establish advisory committee starting with Visitor Connection Working Group member organizations • Hire local capacity to convene / facilitate
Face-to-Face Interactions		Identify and coordinate regional face-to-face communication opportunities, including • Local Host & Ranger Programs • Out-of-Region Ambassador Programs
Website		• Year 1: Build, develop, and maintain landing page • Year 2 & 3: Website expansion and upgrades
Branded Digital Outreach Toolkit		Create turnkey content for Digital Outreach Toolkit with assets for social media, newsletters, and email lists. • Year 2 & 3: Create additional digital collateral to be determined by Phase I Strategic Plan • Expanded Digital Collateral / Strategic Digital Ad Buys / Toolkit Expansion • Recommendations include video, radio ads, podcast, ad buys, and additional turnkey graphics
Regional Handbook		Create Regional Handbook content with training program for frontline employees
Pop-Up Information Kiosk Program		Coordinate Pop-Up Information Kiosk program
Signage on Hwy 395		Coordinate Signage Implementation • Signage on Hwy 395 to include Eastern Sierra Scenic Byway asset review
Visitor Connection Research Program		Ongoing research to better understand visitation audience and maximize messaging efficacy
Analog Collateral		Create content for analog collateral, oversee production, coordinate distribution. Recommendations include: • Regionally Coordinated Map Series • FAQ Handheld Product • Posters/Flyers • Business Card directing visitors to landing page and stewardship message
Stewardship Education / Celebration of Local Culture		Create expanded content for stewardship education and the celebration of regional culture
Support and Incentive Program		Develop grant-based financial incentives for engagement from non-profits, businesses, and other elements of the community.

Attachment B
Visitor Connection Program: Deliverables by Component

Equity & Access		Equity & access expert consultation and programming • Land acknowledgment & other advisory elements • Focus groups • Translation • Programming
Administrative Capacity		• Oversight and management of the project • Ongoing consultation with ESSRP partners and representation at partner meetings • Updates, consultation with ESCOG members and advisory committee • Create, implement and oversee RFQs / RFPs and relationship with contractor(s) • Financial tracking, reporting, and invoicing • ESCOG staff to provide updates and attend ESSRP and advisory committee meetings

Business Development & Identify Revenue Streams		Develop programs and pursue additional revenue streams
		• Develop sponsorship/membership program
		• Other regional initiatives:
		    o RFFCP Wildfire messaging
		    o "Camp Like A Pro"
		• State / Federal grants

Attachment C
Visitor Connection Program: Implementation Cost Summary

Calculations of Pro Rata Share for Funding Contributions Using Revenue Projections from ESCOG Member Agencies

		21/22 Budgeted Revenue (in millions)	% of total		Current Population	% of total
Inyo County		$ 111	37%		17977	41%
Mono County		$ 116	39%		14310	32%
Town of Mammoth Lakes		$ 63	21%		8169	18%
City of Bishop		$ 10	3%		3745	8%
TOTAL		$ 300	100%			100%

Requested Total Amounts for ESCOG Member Agency Contributions

		Proposed Annual VCP Contribution (Per Year for 3 years)	% of total		21/22 Budgeted Revenue (in millions)	% of total
Inyo County		$ 100,000.00	38%		$ 111	37%
Mono County		$ 100,000.00	38%		$ 116	39%
Town of Mammoth Lakes		$ 50,000.00	19%		$ 63	21%
City of Bishop		$ 10,000.00	4%		$ 10	3%
TOTAL		$ 260,000.00	100%		$ 300	100%

STAFF REPORT

To: ESCOG Joint Powers Authority

From: Elaine Kabala, ESCOG Staff

Subject: ESCOG Staff Coordination with Regional Leadership

Meeting date: February 4, 2022

Prepared on: January 28, 2022

Attachments: A) ESCOG Organizational Map

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BACKGROUND/HISTORY:
In preparation for preparing messaging materials for the ESCOG to communicate the organization's mission, purpose and projects – including an updated website – staff would like to arrange meetings with regional leadership to discuss the ESCOG's current program of work and suggested candidates for future programs of work that will best support regional collaboration and advancement. In addition, staff is seeking technical guidance for scaling the ESCOG organization. Attachment A illustrates the existing work and organization of the existing Sustainable Recreation and Ecosystem Management Program of Work, and potential future areas for regional collaboration for your Board's consideration.

In addition to one-on-one meetings with the Administrators of the four member agencies, staff is requesting the Board direct ESCOG staff participate in the regular regional roundtables of regional leadership to report relevant information to the ESCOG Board as appropriate.

BUDGET IMPACTS:
None.

LEGAL REVIEW:
ESCOG Counsel Grace Chuchla has reviewed this item and found that it complies with the law.

RECOMMENDATION:
Staff requests the Board discuss and provide direction to staff to convene meetings with the administrator of the four member agencies and direct staff to include ESCOG staff in the regular meetings of the County and City Administrators.

EASTERN SIERRA COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS
Organization

Eastern Sierra Council of Governments Board of Directors

Executive Director

SREMP - Activated

Sustainable Recreation
- BIRPI
- Towns to Trails
- VCP
- Scenic Byway
- Campground Improvements*
- Regional Rec. Capacity*
- Climate Adaptation

Eco. Management
- CDFW / Pace and Scale Accelerator*
- Climate Adaptation
- Wildfire Task Force

Econ. Dev.
- CEDS Development
- CERF Development
  - Phase 1: Planning
  - Phase 2: Implementation

Housing
- Housing Roundtable / Partnership meetings
- Regional Housing Plan (?)

Outreach and Advocacy
- Regional coordination with local partners
- Land management partnership building
  - USFS / BLM / NPS / LADWP
- Regional advocacy w/ State/Fed agencies
- Branding / Outreach / Website

Funding
- Member agency contributions
- CDFW Prop 1 grant
- NFWF BIRPI grant
- Sierra Nevada Conservancy grant
- Potential USDA Strategic Economic and Community Development grant
- Potential American Rescue Plan Funds

Funding
- Member agency contributions
- Inyo Co. RCRC CEDS grant
- CERF funding

Funding
- Member agency contributions
- REAP 2.0

Funding
- Member agency contributions

Eastern Sierra Council of Governments (ESCOG)
Joint Powers Authority Agenda

STAFF REPORT

To:	ESCOG Joint Powers Authority
From:	Elaine Kabala, ESCOG Staff
Subject:	Consideration of the Request for Proposals (RFPs) for the Eastern Sierra Pace and Scale Accelerator
Meeting date:	February 4, 2022
Prepared on:	January 28, 2022
Attachments:	A) Request for Proposals to Provide National Environmental Policy Act Services for the Eastern Sierra Pace and Scale Accelerator

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BACKGROUND/HISTORY:

The Eastern Sierra Council of Governments (ESCOG) was awarded a California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) Proposition 1 grant on June 15, 2021 in the amount of $3,384,269 for the Eastern Sierra Pace and Scale Accelerator project under authority of the Sustainable Recreation and Ecosystem Management Accelerator (SREMP). The Eastern Sierra Pace and Scale Program aims to increase local capacity for environmental planning in the Eastern Sierra by investing in dedicated professionals to build a locally based workforce in the area of environmental planning. The pilot project for development local environmental planning capacity to be funded by the grant is the Eastern Sierra Climate & Communities Resilience Project (ESCCRP), which is a landscape level restoration and fuels treatment project in the Mammoth Lakes area.

Staff is requesting the Board consider the Requests for Proposal (RFP) to secure qualified consultants to execute the scope of work described in the grant agreement, and establish a subcommittee to assist with consultant selection.

ANALYSIS/DISCUSSION:

As described above, the grant provides $3,384,269 to the ESCOG for implementation of the Eastern Sierra Pace and Scale Accelerator. The Scope of Work broadly includes:

1. Project Management and Administration
2. Development of an Interdisciplinary Team (IDT)
3. Environmental Planning work including:
   a. Obtaining permits
   b. Botanical Assessments

       c.   Archaeological Assessments
       d.   Wildlife Habitat Assessment
       e.   Recreation Assessment
       f.   NEPA Scoping

4. Preparing the ESCRRP for Implementation
5. Preparing for California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) analysis
6. Development of a Monitoring Plan
7. Education and Outreach
8. Local Workforce Development
9. Finance and Marketing Plan

The ESCOG entered into an agreement with The Whitebark Institute to provide Project Management Services on January 18, 2022.

Staff has developed the attached RFP for completing the Environmental Planning scope of work. The environmental planning consultant will be responsible for NEPA studies, document preparation, and monitoring plan development. The contract timelines may be refined in consultation with The Whitebark Institute during contract negotiation with the selected environmental planning consultant.

BUDGET IMPACTS:
The grant award is for $3,384,269. The allocated budget for ESCOG staff to administer the grant is $123,790, plus $5,000 in indirect cost recovery for each subcontractor, for a total of $10,000.

LEGAL REVIEW:
ESCOG Counsel Grace Chuchla has reviewed this item and found that it complies with the law.

RECOMMENDATION:
Staff requests the ESCOG Board review the Request for Proposals to Provide National Environmental Policy Act Services for the Eastern Sierra Pace and Scale Accelerator and direct staff to notice the Request for Proposals appropriately.

EASTERN SIERRA COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS
Joint Powers Authority

Request for Proposals to Provide National Environmental Policy Act Services for the Eastern Sierra Pace and Scale Accelerator

Proposal deadline: <mark>Date, time, month</mark>

Requesting Organization: Eastern Sierra Council of Governments
Contact: Elaine Kabala, Executive Director, ekabala@escog.ca.gov

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Overview

The Eastern Sierra Council of Governments (ESCOG), on behalf of the Inyo National Forest, intends to contract a qualified consultant to provide comprehensive National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) environmental planning services for its Sustainable Recreation and Ecosystem Management Program (SREMP) beginning with its top priority project, the 56,000 acre Eastern Sierra Climate & Communities Resilience Project (ESCCRP). Centered around the Town of Mammoth Lakes, the recreation hub of the Eastern Sierra, with severely declining forest health, and millions of dollars of built infrastructure and natural ecosystem values at risk, the project requires NEPA compliance services.

The selected consultant will be responsible for two distinct deliverables: 1) staffing and managing a full interdisciplinary team (IDT) as described below, capable of conducting the necessary studies and environmental analysis for required environmental compliance on Federal USFS lands, resulting in a Federal Decision for the ESCCRP; 2) conducting surveys needed on 10,000 priority acres to prepare them for immediate implementation pending completion of the NEPA decision. The ESCOG desires to establish one contract with a single consultant for all services requested in this RFP, therefore the onus is on the applicant to sub-contract any subset of services the applicant cannot meet internally.

Environmental planning capacity shortages in the eastern Sierra have burdened the region for decades and the ESCOG's *Eastern Sierra Pace & Scale Accelerator* grant award is aimed at holistically solving for this long overdue issue in the region. Upon identification of the ideal candidate, the desire of the ESCOG is to establish a professional relationship with this third party IDT, in an attempt to build long overdue environmental planning capacity in the Eastern Sierra. It is the ESCOG's intent that this IDT will be available for other future SREMP projects, and will help to address growing pace and scale needs in the region.

The successful consultant will work closely under the direction of the Project Manager, already retained by the ESCOG, to oversee the comprehensive work scope for this phase of project planning. The investment by the ESCOG and the INF in this partnership is designed to better align the consultant early in the planning process with agency priorities and local land management needs, resulting with NEPA documents that better serve USFS needs. The team ultimately built from this grant will serve as the foundation for the ESCOG's *Eastern Sierra Pace & Scale Accelerator* grant awarded by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, under the Managing Headwaters for Multiple Benefits priority.

ESCCRP NEPA Planning Approach

The NEPA analysis for the project area will describe site-specific management activities using a condition-based approach. A condition-based approach prescribes actions to be taken under specific conditions to achieve particular outcomes. Condition-based proposals typically include a set of management prescriptions/treatments, resource protection measures, and constraints that instruct forest managers where to apply different treatments depending on the conditions they find on the ground at the time of the survey work completed prior to the project's implementation.

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NEPA analysis using condition-based management must be specific enough to address issues associated with the project proposed actions (Exhibit A) and satisfy NEPA's site-specificity requirements. A condition-based approach does not mean that site-specific analyses are not completed. However, it does mean that there may be less geographically precise information available for analysis than a smaller project. The area requiring NEPA is relatively large, and the entire project area cannot feasibly be surveyed before a decision is made. The necessary surveys are planned to be completed prior to the implementation of any treatment units. The environmental analysis would identify resources that would need surveys before implementation, and those resources that have sufficient information at the time of the analysis and would not need further surveys.

One decision will be made for the entire project area, and that decision will allow for some flexibility, depending on conditions within each treatment area. All of the options for treatment, as outlined in the proposed actions (Exhibit A) will be analyzed in the NEPA analysis. A summary of the proposed actions is provided below.

To meet the project's purpose and need, the Inyo National Forest proposes to restore forest structure and composition by reducing tree densities and fuel loading, increasing stand structural heterogeneity, and enhancing forest resilience and diversity across approximately 56,000 acres:

- Jeffrey pine, Dry Mixed Conifer, Red fir, and Lodgepole pine fuel reduction and forest restoration, including live and dead tree cutting and removal of large hazardous fuel loads from the forest floor.
- Aspen and meadow restoration including tree cutting and removal of large hazardous fuels from riparian channels, aspen stands, and meadows.
- Remove encroaching conifers from sage brush to improve sage grouse habitat
- Hand labor and/or mechanized equipment will be utilized where effective and appropriate to implement these proposed actions.
- Existing and activity generated biomass will be piled to be burned in some cases or in others chipped.
- The removal of material may also occur through sales, instead of piling, such as, but not limited to timber, biomass, or fuelwood sales.
- Some treatment units may have activity generated materials left on the forest floor or in log decks for public fuelwood gathering. These areas would implement special considerations to ensure public safety and accessibility such as flush cutting stumps and removing snags

Priority Surveys
An initial prioritization effort is underway with ESCCRP stakeholders that will identify the first 10,000 acres on which top priority surveys will be included under this work scope. Maps of these 10,000 high priority acres will be available prior to starting work on this contract but are not available at the time of the circulation of this RFP.   The consultant can assume that these priority acres will total at minimum

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10,000 acres, which is the minimum acres of surveys required under the CDFW grant agreement. Travel time to these priority areas is expected to be within close proximity to the Town of Mammoth Lakes and will not exceed a 20 min drive (one way).

Subsequent areas to be treated, after the 10,000 highest priority acres identified in this work scope, will be prioritized using a science-based framework agreed to by the ESCCRP stakeholders. Once the NEPA decision is finalized, the surveys and implementation will be phased based on the agreed-upon prioritization framework. Ongoing monitoring of the outcomes of each treatment area, combined with adaptive management, will allow for adjusting future treatments accordingly.

The successful consultant will be selected through a competitive Request for Proposals (RFP) process. The period of performance will not surpass March 1, 2025, and the consultant will be expected to meet predetermined grant timelines for deliverables described below.

Eastern Sierra Pace & Scale Accelerator: Background

Declining forest health across the West, coupled with a rapidly intensifying wildfire trajectory fueled by climate change, have continued to underscore the imperative need for increased pace and scale of pro-active vegetation management treatments across public and private land. The Eastern Sierra Pace and Scale Accelerator will conduct environmental analyses for a landscape-scale forest restoration project through creation of a locally based Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) that will conduct third party NEPA for the ESCCRP and be available for similar environmental services on projects in the future. The new IDT will carry out all steps required to arrive at appropriate decision documents for NEPA. Together, the environmental review of the landscape-scale project and the new IDT are key components that begin to address forest restoration pace and scale needs of the eastern Sierra. The IDT is expected to coalesce to fulfill the NEPA requirements for the ESCCRP landscape-scale forest restoration project; however, the ESCOG intends for the IDT to establish local workforce and relationships necessary with the Inyo National Forest to facilitate third-party NEPA planning and project permitting into the future.

PACE: Interdisciplinary Team Development

The Inyo National Forest (INF) is disproportionally disadvantaged when it comes to environmental planning on its approximately two million acres. With only one interdisciplinary team (IDT) for the entire forest, as opposed to neighboring forests with one IDT per district, the Inyo has long struggled to keep pace with environmental planning needs. Shifting budgets of federal resources toward fire suppression in conjunction with overall budget reductions have further curtailed the ability of the Inyo National Forest to respond effectively to the need for forest restoration at a scale commensurate with the values at risk.

The Eastern Sierra Council of Governments (ESCOG) recognizes that present pace and scale needs related to fire resilience and ecosystem health alone far outweigh the capacity of any single entity in the Eastern Sierra, and long overdue sustainable recreation planning, another important regional need, have also gone unfulfilled. Following the 2020 fire season, four non-profit organizations joined forces to request the ESCOG support a program of work to enhance forest health and sustainable recreation in the eastern Sierra. Dubbed the Sustainable Recreation & Management Program (SREMP), the resolution combines two funded programs in the eastern Sierra, the Sustainable Recreation and Tourism Initiative (SRTI), and the Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program (RFFCP). Both programs are positioned to yield project pipelines specific to their cause, all in need of environmental compliance work. This grant

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application is the first in the ESCOG's new SREMP program and will help harness the regional momentum and solve a fundamental need for environmental planning services.

SCALE: Eastern Sierra Climate & Communities Resilience Project

The [Eastern Sierra Climate & Communities Resilience Project](#) (ESCCRP) is a 56,000-acre forest restoration project that aims to promote resilient landscapes, support fire adapted communities, and provide for safer and more effective emergency response. Awarded preplanning funds by the Sierra Nevada Conservancy in 2020, the ESCCRP recognizes irreplaceable ecosystem services are at risk in this important landscape. The project also addresses California's current wildfire trajectory and aims to intercept it, thereby safeguarding priceless ecosystem services and the communities that depend on them. The ESCCRP will restore resilience to the overstocked forest landscapes of two key headwater basins, the Upper Owens River and the Middle Fork San Joaquin River, an essential first step toward protecting the valuable resources in these headwaters.

Contract Scope

The Eastern Sierra Council of Governments (ESCOG) intends to contract a qualified consulting team to establish a locally-based ID Team that will work in partnership with the Inyo National Forest to complete third party NEPA to the standards and approvals required by the US Forest Service, focusing on the Eastern Sierra Climate and Communities Resiliency Project (ESCCRP).

In addition to standard expectations for a qualified Environmental Planning Consulting Team, including specialized expertise to complete all required NEPA studies and assessments, the ideal candidate will be familiar with the eastern Sierra ecosystems and natural resource management, have a working relationship with key partners and stakeholders – the Inyo National Forest in particular and be familiar with the ESCCRP, as well as other project objectives of the ESCOG Sustainable Recreation and Ecosystem Management Program (SREMP). The Environmental Planning Team shall also be responsible for facilitating public outreach and input, as is customary in the NEPA scoping process.

The desired qualifications for the Environmental Planning Team are described below:

Desired Qualifications Environmental Planning Consulting Team

- Demonstrated NEPA/CEQA planning knowledge and experience
- Experience leading programs and teams to accomplish environmental planning
- Strong knowledge of Eastern Sierra ecosystems and natural resource management issues
- Experience with landscape scale forest restoration projects such as the Eastern Sierra Climate and Communities Resiliency Project (ESCCRP)
- Proven commitment to building capacity in Eastern Sierra communities to improve natural resource management
- Experience with forest/watershed restoration planning, and implementation
- Strong working relationship with USFS and the Inyo National Forest
- Public meeting facilitation
- Ability to interpret scientific data to draft technical reports
- *Qualified specialist expertise in each of the following areas :
    - Botany
    - Archeology

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- o Wildlife Biology
- o Fisheries
- o Public lands recreation
- o Hydrology
- o Soil science
- o GIS mapping and data analysis
- o Monitoring plan development

* Specialties in air quality and forestry (silviculture/fire and fuels) will be provided by the Inyo National Forest. The ESCOG is not seeking services in those two disciplines from the consultant. However, the consultant will be required to work closely with USFS Staff to ensure timely completion of tasks associated with those specialties as they pertain to the NEPA planning process.

Activities and Project Deliverables

Surveys and Permits

The Environmental Planning consultant will work with the USFS to schedule and conduct all necessary environmental surveys for NEPA compliance using the condition-based planning approached described in the Overview. The Environmental Planning consultant will determine applicable Inyo National Forest land and resource management plan components and review for compliance and development of project design features for all assessments and surveys to be conducted. The Environmental Planning consultant will use the data and research gathered to recommend project design features or proposed action modifications or alternatives.

Task 1 - Botanical Assessment

The consultant shall complete a botanical assessment for the project area, which will include but is not limited to:

- o Review known information about at-risk species habitat;
- o Conduct vegetation mapping, biological surveys, and habitat assessments in priority areas;
- o Prepare a Summary Survey Report and GIS-based maps;
- o Prepare a Draft Analysis of At-risk Plants including habitat evaluation; and
- o Prepare a Weed Risk Assessment Report and determine weed spread mitigations.

Task 2 - Archaeological Assessment

The consultant shall complete an archaeological assessment for the project area, with permissions and permits from the USFS and other agencies as needed, which will include but is not limited to:
- o Surveying priority areas that do not have existing up-to-date records. Record sites utilizing "Historic Property Recording Specifications";
- o Recording all newly discovered prehistoric, ethnographic, and historical heritage resources encountered within and directly adjacent to the project area(s);
- o Re-recording or supplementing existing site records as needed based on discrepancies, alterations and impacts observed;
- o Recording all heritage resource sites using State Historic Preservation Office site forms; and
- o Using USFS Region 5 standards to record all site boundaries (resource-grade Global Positioning System (GPS).

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The consultant shall assign CA State Trinomial numbers for all sites in project area for inclusion in the Final Report. The Consultant shall complete Archaeological Project Effects Analysis Report. In-Situ Artifact Recording procedures will be followed during both inventory and site recording activities. The Consultant shall coordinate with the USFS who will consult with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) for concurrence on eligibility and effects findings. The consultant shall submit proof of the completion of the Archaeological Assessment and the Archaeological Project Effects Analysis Report to the ESCOG.

Task 3 - Wildlife Habitat Assessment

The consultant shall review known information about at-risk species habitat in the project area, conduct habitat mapping, wildlife surveys, and habitat assessments to the level necessary, and include State listed species as necessary preparation for CEQA. The consultant will consult with USFS who will consult with the US Fish and Wildlife Service to produce a Biological Opinion for species with Federal status.

The consultant will prepare the following information for submission for the CDFW Grant Manager Wildlife Habitat Assessment which will include but not limited to the following:

- o Summary Survey Report and Geographic information System (GIS)-based maps.
- o Draft Analysis of Species of Conservation Concern, which will include habitat evaluation
- o A Draft Biological Assessment for species with Federal status, including threatened, endangered, or proposed threatened or endangered
- o Biological Opinion

Task 4 - Recreation Assessment

The consultant shall provide an analysis of recreational facilities and activities within the project area using existing GIS and other information. The consultant shall identify facilities and/or activities that have the potential for beneficial or adverse effects from wildfire as well as possible effects to the Project. The consultant shall provide a Recreation Assessment which will include but not limited to the Recreational Effects Analysis for the Project.

Task 5 – Hydrology & Soils Assessment

Grantee will identify and map waterways, wetlands, meadows, springs, and other water features using GIS, field verifications, air photos, or other methods as needed. This will include: Delineating waterbody buffer zones using Lahontan Water Board definitions; Planning design features and proposed action mitigations or alternatives based on analysis findings. Grantee will submit to the CDFW Grant Manager the Hydrology & Soils Assessment which will include but not limited to:

- Delineate riparian conservation areas using GIS (using definitions in the Inyo National Forest land management plan)
- Review water bodies in analysis area to record any special designations (303d list, special status, designated Wild and Scenic Rivers)
- Determine applicable Inyo National Forest land and resource management plan components and review for compliance and development of project design features
- Complete Cumulative Watershed Effects analysis using the Equivalent Roaded Area method
- Prepare a Watershed Report that analyzes project effects to water quality, water temperature, stream morphology, soil erosion and productivity, incorporating the results of the previous bullets

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- Prepare a Timber Waiver application and consult with the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board.

Task 6 – Environmental Assessment, Conduct NEPA Scoping & Facilitate Decision Process

The consultant shall conduct all necessary actions to produce National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance documents for review and finalization by the United States Forest Service (USFS) Responsible Official. The consultant will provide facilitation of stakeholder group public engagement, scoping and comment period.,. The Consultant will work closely with the USFS to complete the appropriate environmental studies and analyses for the ESCCRP for adequate environmental review and public scoping. It is expected that an Environmental Assessment will be adequate for this project. However, the USFS Responsible Official will determine if an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is required. If a FONSI cannot be completed under an Environmental Assessment, and an EIS is required, any necessary additional work with be procured outside the scope of this project. The consultant will work with the USFS to finalize all NEPA compliance documents and facilitate the public participation and notification process for the final decision.

Task 7 – Monitoring Plan

The Consultant will lead the work to establish additional baseline monitoring requirements, in addition to the already established monitoring as described in the USFS Land Management Plan. The Consultant will work with the Project Manager and USFS partners to maximize the learning opportunity the ESCCRP provides through the Monitoring Plan development. The consultant will work with USFS to determine how the standard monitoring required covers the project area and develop a Monitoring Plan that will include but is not limited to:

- Identify established protocols and monitoring efforts by partners, adjacent landowners, and collaborating agencies.
- Work with USFS to implement Monitoring Guidance.
- Ensure the monitoring developed is within the technical, financial, and staffing capability of the USFS and partners.
- Develop performance measures to be included with Monitoring Plan.

The Consultant will work with the USFS to determine what additional monitoring specific to the ESCCRP will be required under the terms of the USFS Land Management Plan, to include the development of monitoring protocols and any other requirements necessary for a complete Monitoring Plan.

Task 8- CEQA Planning Assessment

The consultant will work with the Project Manager to evaluate CEQA planning needs for the project area if the current SB-901 exemption for NEPA ready Federal land is not expected to remain in effect in the State of California. This task will include assessing CEQA planning costs for the entire federally owned project area in order to ensure the project is eligible for State funding to implement. Specific CEQA planning task include are but are not limited to:

- Identification of appropriate Lead Agency
- Draft work scope for appropriate CEQA compliance
- Draft budget for CEQA compliance

Upon identification of the appropriate work scope, budget and timeline, the ESCOG may request additional CEQA planning services if budgets permit.

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Contract Deliverables and Timelines

The Consultant shall provide the following deliverables:

Item #	Deliverable	Due Date
1	All Required Relevant Permits	As dictated by appropriate discipline
2	Botanical Assessment	March 2024
3	Archaeological Assessment	March 2024
4	Wildlife Habitat Assessment	March 2024
5	Recreation Assessment	March 2024
6	Hydrology and Soils Assessment	March 2024
7	GIS Based Maps	April 2024
8	Monitoring Plan	September 2023
9	Draft NEPA documents	July 2024
10	Final NEPA documents	January 2025

Criteria for Competitive Applications

The evaluation criteria listed below will be used to evaluate proposals for the purpose of ranking them based on how fully each proposal meets the requirements of this RFP. Successful consultant may be asked to modify objectives, work plans, or budgets prior to final approval of the award.

1. <u>Understanding of the Scope of Work</u>. A statement demonstrating a thorough understanding of the ESCCRP, team building, personnel management, field surveys and data analysis, and appropriate assessments as required by NEPA. Providing technical expertise in completing environmental affects analysis and drafting NEPA supporting documents for Federal Agency review and approval. Preference will be given to consultants who are capable of building an IDT team workforce based in the eastern Sierra for future NEPA collaboration with the INF in alignment with the ESCOG's Sustainable Recreation and Ecosystem Management Program. Additional credit will be given to applicants involved with active environmental work programs in the Eastern Sierra. (25%)

2. <u>Technical Approach</u>. The proposed technical approach for fulfilling the scope of work must demonstrate familiarity with the ESCCRP, IDT team building in partnership with federal agencies, and proficiency in understanding the survey and analysis requirements of the NEPA process, and demonstration of successful management of complex projects with high levels of technical expertise required. (25%)

   <u>Qualifications of Proposed Personnel</u>. The proposal should describe relevant professional experience in the following areas: (a) experience dealing with Federal, state, and local governmental agencies, as well as national and local organizations involved with NEPA, and experience completing surveys, analysis or other services in support of NEPA compliance for the Forest Service, if any; (b) an understanding of conducting NEPA generally, and preparing NEPA documents, specifically; (c) biographies including resumes and/or vitae of key staff and their potential role in your proposed work area. If consultant intends to hire these key staff as an outcome of this award, a succinct staffing plan complete with position descriptions seeking

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necessary specialists and/or letters of interest from prospective hires will be accepted in lieu of team resumes (20%)

Contractor's Past Performance. Preference will be given to those who have experience conducting NEPA compliance on Federal lands with experience writing resource reports for California forest ecosystems. The ideal applicant will be able to showcase its experience working cooperatively with the U.S. Forest Service and have examples of NEPA documentation that they have provided to previous clients. The proposal should include: (a) information on the principal investigator(s)'s past performance related to the NEPA technical expertise you will be offering; (b) list recent (last 2-5 years) accomplishments, events and previous services related to the NEPA technical expertise; (c) references including a list of three clients who have received services from your organization that is similar in nature to the proposed work; include names, postal and email addresses, and telephone numbers. (15%)

3. Cost Proposal. The cost proposal budget should be cost effective and should maximize the value for monies requested in the contractor's budget. Proposal costs should be presented in a 'time and materials, not to exceed' format. Proposal costs should be the minimum necessary to adequately achieve the stated scope of work. (15%)

Submission Requirements

Submission requirements will include two distinct and separate documents: 1) Technical Proposal, and 2) Cost Proposal.

Interested parties will submit proposals via email to Elaine Kabala (ekabala@escog.ca.gov) and provide the information as described below:

1. Technical Proposal (6-page limit for entire Technical Proposal):
   a. Narrative - Concise (6-page limit) description of the work plan to include the following sections from the Criteria for Competitive Applications:
   o Understanding of the Scope of Work,
   o Technical Approach,
   o Qualifications of Proposed Personnel,
   o The Contractor's Past Performance.
   o Contact Information - Primary contact person, company name, address, phone, email, and website.
2. Cost Proposal: The Cost Proposal includes the proposal budget and budget justification.

Respondents may indicate that they consider any part of their proposal to be confidential and/or trade secret information by clearly stamping any pages that contain such information with the word "CONFIDENTIAL" in the header of that page. However, respondents must also be aware that, as a public agency, ESCOG is subject to the California Public Records Act, and by submitting a proposal to ESCOG, all parts of the proposal may become a public record that is subject to disclosure to any member of the public. Should ESCOG receive a Public Records Act request to disclose a proposal that contains allegedly confidential information, ESCOG will independently assess the respondent's assertion of a need for confidentiality to determine whether any part of the proposal can be withheld from disclosure.

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Eastern Sierra Climate and Communities Resilience Project

Contact:

Stephen Calkins

Stephen.calkins@usda.gov

760-965-9663

This preliminary document is a draft and is subject to change.

Table of Contents

Background

The project area is located on approximately 55,000 acres of Inyo National Forest Land, surrounding the Town of Mammoth Lakes (TOML). These acres are primarily on the Mammoth Ranger District and partly on the Mono Lakes Ranger District. The project is bounded to the south by the John Muir Wilderness and to the west by the Ansel Adams Wilderness. The northern and eastern project boundaries are delineated by well-maintained roads such as Deadman Creek Road, Owens River Road, Claypit Cutoff, and other National Forest System Roads. The southeastern project boundary abuts Los Angeles Department of Water and Power land. Specific descriptions for the ecotypes encompassed by the project area precede their proposed actions. The project encompasses land ranging from historical pine plantations to unlogged Jeffrey pine forest, and from prescribe-fire burned forest to heavily fuel loaded and unburned forest.

Purpose and Need for Action

Due to the effects of fire exclusion and past management on Inyo National Forest lands, forests have become over dense, possess continuous and elevated fuel loading, non-fire and drought resistant tree composition, and homogenized spatial structure. For most of the project area, these conditions are not in line with the stated Desired Conditions of the Land Management Plan for the Inyo National Forest (LMP, 2019) or within the historical range of variation. Higher than historically present tree densities increase competition for limited water resources leading to more severe drought stress and degraded forest health. Tree composition has become dominated by fire intolerant species reducing the short-term resistance and long-term resilience of the forests to fire. Surface and ladder fuels are also at a much higher density than historically was present creating the conditions for high severity crown fires. Specifically, forests surrounding the TOML currently have high forest densities and structures that make them susceptible to an uncharacteristically large, high-severity wildfire, drought stresses, and widespread bark beetle mortality, all of which pose a major risk to lives, property, natural resources, and the economic viability of the TOML and the Eastern Sierra Nevada.

Wildfire risk analysis in the LMP identified a high concentration of Community Wildfire Protection Zone (CWPZ) and General Wildfire Protection Zone (GWPZ) acres, 23,720 and 22,121 acres respectively, comprising 82% of the total project area. The CWPZ encompasses locations where communities, community assets, and private land could be at a very high risk of damage from wildfire where high fuel loadings exist and are in close proximity to the Forest boundary. Wildfires that start in this zone contribute more to potential loss of community values and assets than any other strategic fire management zone. The GWPZ identifies where conditions currently put some natural resource and/or community values at high risk of damage from wildfire. Wildfires in this zone will likely have negative effects on natural resources due to the degraded condition of forest ecosystems associated with the absence of several natural fire cycles. Although some wildfires that burn in the GWPZ can potentially benefit some natural resources, high negative impacts to many natural resources are more likely under most weather, fuel moisture, and other environmental conditions during the fire season. The abundance of acres

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classified as CWPZ and GWPZ demonstrates the urgent need to create forest conditions for low to moderate fire severity around the TOML and within the project area through vegetation management.

The best available science published clearly demonstrates the need for a reduction in forest fuel loading and restoration of forest structure, composition, and diversity. Fires have become uncharacteristically large and severe and are projected to continue to do so without intervention. It also makes clear the beneficial effects forest treatments have on firefighting operations such as reducing flame lengths, fire spread rates, and erratic or explosive fire behavior.

There is an urgent need to treat these forests on an increased pace and scale to manage the current environment of large, high severity fires. A major objective of the LMP is to restore at least 20,000 acres of terrestrial ecosystems within the next 10 to 15 years of plan approval (TERR-FW-OBJ 01), particularly surrounding communities (MA-CWPZ-GOAL). This project marks a significant advance in bringing us closer to these objectives and Desired Conditions of the LMP. There is also a desire to utilize prescribed fire for forest management and restore fire as an essential ecosystem process (TERR-MONT-DC 02). The majority of the forest in the project area is severely departed from its historical fire regime and is experiencing decreased fire frequency because of aggressive fire suppression in combination with past forest management. This has led to denser, more uniform vegetation and an accumulation of high levels of hazardous fuels, and as such are not suitable for safe and effective prescribed fire entry. This densification and accumulation of fuels, especially in forests that historically burned frequently such as those found in the project area, promotes more severe and undesirable fire effects. Fuel reduction and forest structure management actions from this project are required to create safe conditions for reestablishing natural fire regimes and restoring fire-dependent forest ecosystems and biodiversity surrounding the TOML.

Forest thinning and fuel reduction will enable the protection of private and public assets; the safe and effective implementation of prescribed fire; the use of wildland fire for multiple resource benefits and not require immediate suppression; as well as improve forest health, restore habitats, and increase resiliency to insects, disease and wildfire. This will shift current vegetation conditions towards their Desired Conditions identified in the Inyo National Forest Land Management Plan.

Proposed Action

To meet the project's purpose and need, the Inyo National Forest proposes to restore forest structure and composition by reducing tree densities and fuel loading, increasing stand structural heterogeneity, and enhancing forest resilience and diversity across approximately 55,000 acres:

- Jeffrey pine, Dry Mixed Conifer, Red fir, and Lodgepole pine fuel reduction and forest restoration, including live and dead tree cutting and removal of large hazardous fuels from the forest floor.

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- Aspen and meadow restoration including tree cutting and removal of large hazardous fuels from riparian channels, aspen stands, and meadows.
- Remove encroaching conifers from sage brush to improve sage grouse habitat
- Hand labor and/or mechanized equipment will be utilized where effective and appropriate to implement these proposed actions.
- Existing and activity generated biomass will be piled to be burned in some cases or in others chipped.
- The removal of material may also occur through sales, instead of piling, such as, but not limited to timber, biomass, or fuelwood sales.
- Some treatment units may have activity generated materials left on the forest floor or in log decks for public fuelwood gathering. These areas would implement special considerations to ensure public safety and accessibility such as flush cutting stumps and removing snags.
- Whitebark pine restoration and/or enhancement treatments

The project area covers a diverse range of special management concerns and current conditions in addition to those listed. Maps presented below are only modeled estimates and require surveys and ground truthing to determine the actual conditions. Implementation of this project will follow the Decision Matrix after a determination of current conditions have been made. See Proposed Actions for more details including general forest proposed actions and specific proposed actions by emphasis area are outlined in further detail.

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Emphasis Areas - Ecosystem Types
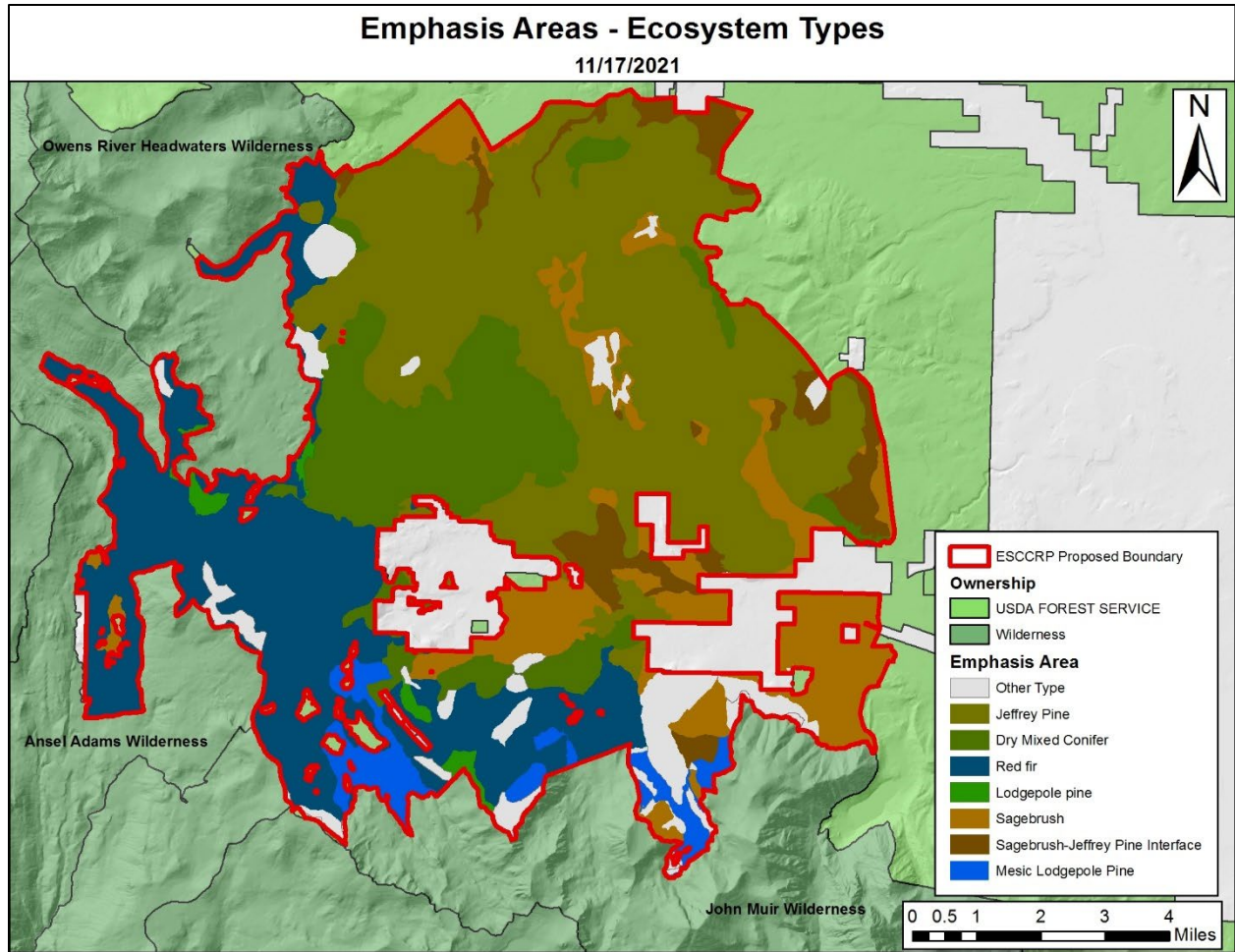### 11/17/2021

Figure 1 Major ecosystem types are delineated into Emphasis Areas for the project. The table below lists acreage by forest types displayed on the map.

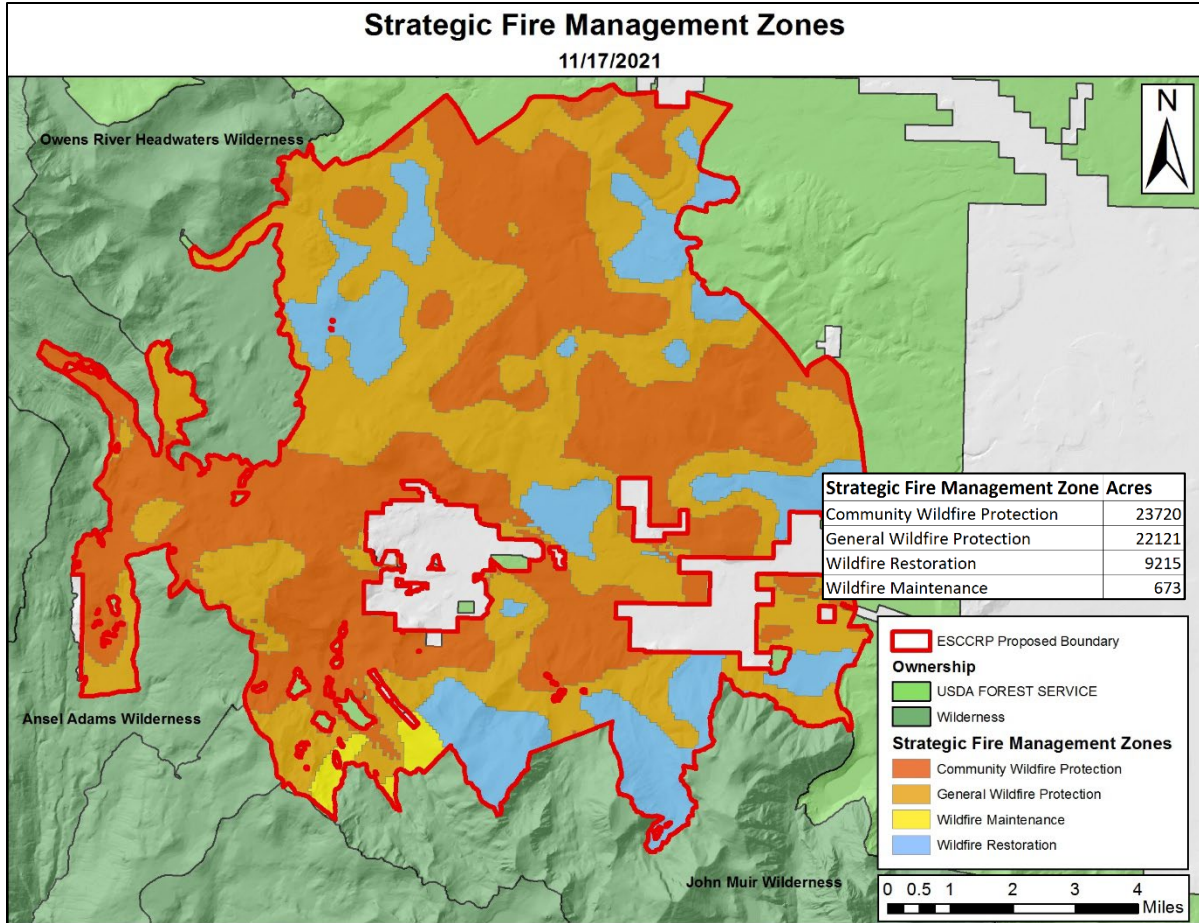| TEUI Vegetation Type	Acres
Jeffrey Pine	20,609
Red fir	12,785
Dry Mixed Conifer	7,932
Sagebrush	6,473
Sagebrush-Jeffrey Pine Interface	2,670
Mesic Lodgepole	1,839
Lodgepole pine	508
Other Type	3,226

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Figure 2 Strategic fire Management Zones are delineated within the project area. Over 80% of the project area is within the Community Wildfire Protection or General Wildfire Protection zones which are the two most at-risk zones.
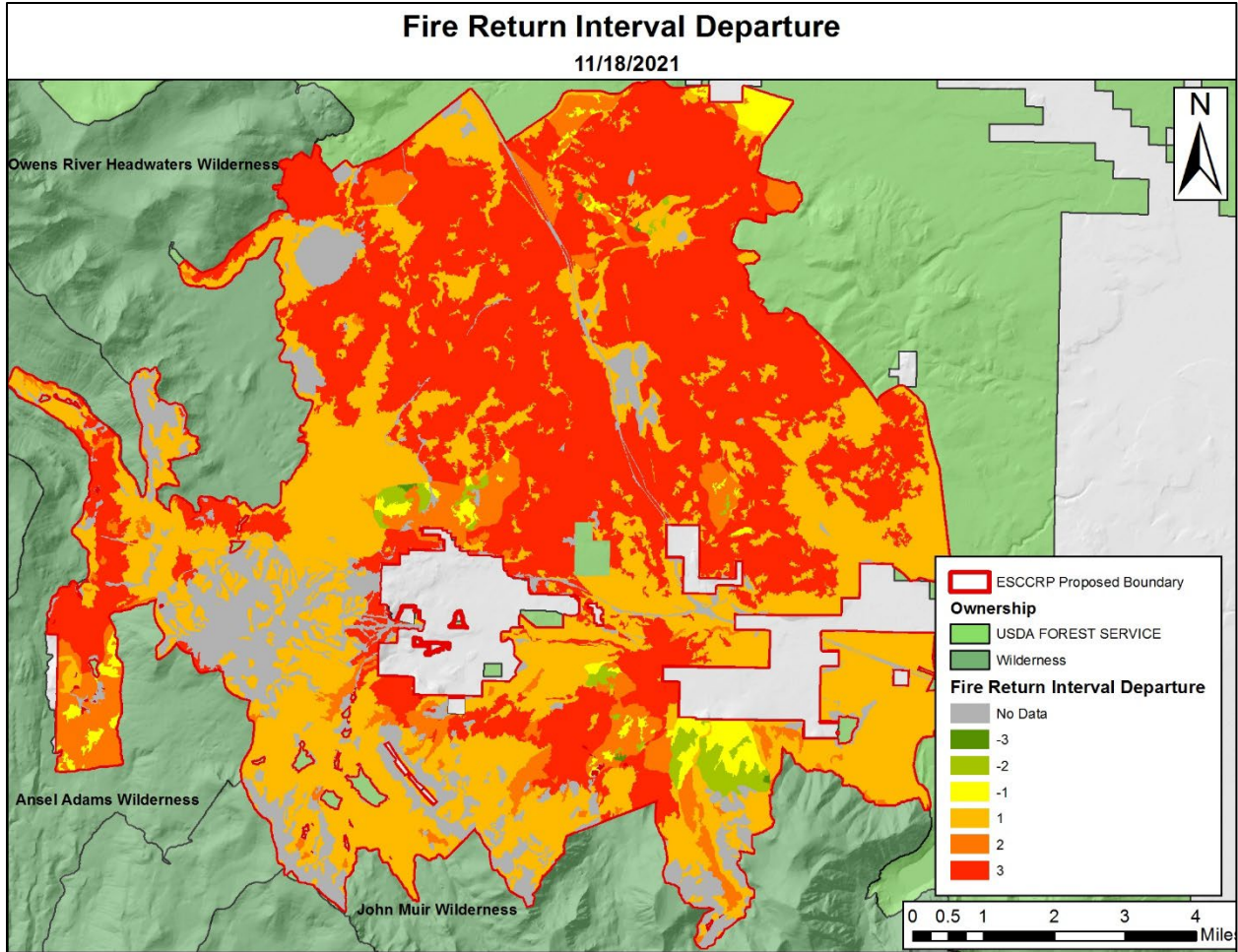
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Fire Return Interval Departure
11/18/2021

Figure 3 The fire return interval departure for the project area. A more positive number and correspondingly darker red color represents land that has gone longer without fire compared to what was historically present. An increasingly negative number and correspondingly darker green represents more fire than was historically present.

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Definitions

BA – basal area, a measurement of the cross-sectional area (ft^2) of a tree's stem at DBH, usually expressed per acre by averaging the basal area of a representative sample of trees in a given area and extrapolating to an acre.

Composition – The diversity and abundance of tree species in a given area.

Structure – The horizontal and vertical arrangement of forest components (live trees, snags, downed logs.

CWD – coarse woody debris, a general classification of non-green biomass of larger diameters.

DBH – diameter at breast height, a measurement of tree diameter taken at 4.5 feet above the ground.

ICO – Individuals, clumps, and openings, a description of forest structure that emphasizes these three desired structural components in their horizontal spatial arrangement within a post-treatment forest (Appendix B).

INF – Inyo National Forest.

LMP – Land Management Plan.

Stocking – A measure of a forest's density, measured as basal area per acre, trees per acre, or other relative or absolute measures of stand density. Forested stands exceeding stocking standards for a management objective are deemed "overstocked" and those under are "understocked".

PMA – Potential management approaches, as defined for the relevant section in the Land Management Plan.

TOML – Town of Mammoth Lakes.

General Project Forest Proposed Actions

The following treatment methods and operational constraints would be used throughout the project area, except where explicitly precluded by emphasis area management actions:

Treatments and Constraints per diameter class:

- Trees less than or equal to 30 inches in diameter will be thinned as part of this project but the majority of trees to be thinned will be less than 20 inches DBH (TERR-FW-STD 01). Trees larger than 20 inches DBH will generally only be thinned if needed to meet desired conditions.
- Trees over 30 inches but less than 40 inches in DBH may only be removed under the specific circumstances in TERR-FW-STD 01:

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- o When public or firefighter safety is threatened and cannot be otherwise mitigated (relevant to all tree diameters including those exceeding 40 inches).
- o When removing trees is needed for aspen or meadow restoration treatments or for cultural or Tribal importance.
- o When required for equipment operability: individual trees less than 35 inches in diameter may be removed when they cannot be reasonably and feasibly avoided.
- o In overstocked stands to favor retention or promote growth of even larger or older shade-intolerant trees to more effectively meet tree species composition and forest structure restoration goals.
- Trees over 40 inches in diameter will not be removed as part of this project.

Snags

- Generally standing dead trees or 'snags' over 12 inches will be retained unless it is required to meet snag density standards or they pose a hazard to infrastructure, workers, or the public (SPEC-SMPF-GDL 01, TERR-OLD-GDL 02, TERR-FW-GDL 01 & 02)
  - o If a tree is deemed a hazard tree there will be no diameter cap.
  - o Dead trees under 12 inches will generally be removed.
  - o Snags that contain nests, dens, or other wildlife built habitat structures will not be removed.

Species of Conservation Concern

- Retain and promote healthy white pine species such as whitebark pine, western white pine, and limber pine in all units where they occur especially healthy mature cone-bearing trees (TERR-FW-DC 03, TERR-ALPN-DC 03 and 04), with the exception of limited removal for hazard trees, project operations, or future disease outbreak, following consultation with the FS botanist or forest health protection officer.
  - o Actions to promote white pine species could include: reducing encroaching species such as fir and lodgepole, creating openings to facilitate seed caching, reducing fuels, or sanitation thinning if needed following consultation with the FS botanist or forest health protection officer.
  - o Slash piles should be constructed at a minimum of 25 ft away from live Whitebark pine and construction sites will be surveyed for seedling/sapling prior to pile construction.
- All trees exhibiting old-growth characteristics (typically largest diameters, thick, platey, bark, large diameter branches, and a flattened top or irregularly shaped crown), including those with wildlife structures will be protected and enhanced through treatments.
- Retain *Juniperus* tree species when encountered in treatment units as these trees occur in areas which are not a concern for high severity wildfire due to typically low surface fuel loadings.

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- Riparian areas will be treated to reduce fuel continuity, but treatments will focus on removal of encroaching conifers and reduction of accumulating dead and down fuels, to retain the crown cover and shade in water bodies (MA-RCA-STD 01).

Wood on the Ground

- Downed logs under 15 inches may be removed. Downed logs over 15 inches will be retained except:
  - When removal is required to meet desired conditions or other plan components in the Land Management Plan such as TERR-OLD-DC 07, TERR-FW-GDL 02, or TERR-MONT-DC Table 3.
  - When removal is required for equipment operability or if they are located such that they pose an excessive fire hazard.

Operations

- Mechanical equipment would be allowed across the entire project area except where it is excluded for resource protection, such as slopes greater than 30%, wet meadows, riparian areas, sensitive natural and cultural resources, invasive plant infestations, etc.
  - Logging equipment such as helicopters, skidders, feller bunchers, processors, and forwarders will primarily be used within the flatter and open forests where road access is adequate for transport of logging equipment. The District Ranger or project manager would consult the relevant specialists if traditional logging equipment is desired in other project areas.
  - When within Waterbody Buffer Zones (WBBZ) only low-pressure ground equipment or hand work will be allowed (See Emphasis Area: Meadows).
- Landings may be created and rehabilitated to facilitate timber sales and fuels treatment. Prior to creation the District Ranger or project manager would consult the relevant specialists to ensure landings are not created in sensitive areas or special habitats (MA-PCT-STD 04, watershed BMPs).
- Temporary roads and bridges may be created and will be rehabilitated to expedite fuels reduction work. Where these are created the District Ranger or project manager would consult the relevant specialists prior to implementation (MA-PCT-STD 04, MA-RCA-STD 16).
- Merchantable and non-merchantable activity generated materials, generated by these fuel reduction and forest restoration activities, will be removed from the forest to meet fuel loading desired conditions as follows:
  - Allow for commercial timber and/or other wood product sales within the project area where feasible, and where operations will not irreversibly cause a detrimental impact to the natural resource (TIMB-FW-DC 02).
    - Removal of timber may occur using ground-based, skyline, or aerial timber systems.

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- Prioritize commercial sales to achieve thinning and fuel reduction when within the Suitable Timber Base as designated in the LMP (TIMB-FW-DC 01, TIMB-FW-OBJ 01).
        - Emphasize the use of mechanical equipment such as feller-bunchers where possible as these are more effective at meeting forest spatial heterogeneity objectives.
    - Non-merchantable activity fuels will be removed by piling and burning to remove fuels from the forest, or chipping and/ or removal from the site when pile and burning is not feasible
    - If fuel loading is sufficiently low for prescribed burning as determined by a specialist, then fuels may be left in place.
- Public fuelwood cutting of downed material may be allowed. Fuelwood may be provided by:
    - Decking of material at a designated location for the public to access.
    - Felling and leaving of material in place for the public to access.
        - Logs will be limbed and bucked, so they all lay flat on the ground. No trees should be left leaning, hanging, or otherwise in a position they are a hazard to fuelwood cutters.
        - Public driving cross-country will be allowed to collect materials left on site; all provisions and prohibitions in the fuelwood collection permit must be followed.
        - Stumps should be flush cut where materials are left in place to aid cross-country travel and fuelwood collection.
        - Rehabilitation of areas impacted by driving off-road and obliteration of roads created by fuelwood cutters accessing firewood will occur following completion of a unit.

Other Constraints

- When within community buffer areas, as established within the Community Wildfire Protection Zone or where the risk is deemed unacceptable to life and property, trees, snags, and logs may be removed more intensively, and terrestrial ecosystem desired conditions may not be met to protect communities and ensure firefighter safety (MA-CWPZ-GOAL 01 and 02).
- Trees targeted for removal will be characteristic of Acceptable or Non-Desirable trees (Appendix D).
    - Trees displaying signs of drought stress will be removed where possible.
    - Trees displaying signs of pests including pitch tubes and flagging branches and or fading tops will be targeted for removal.

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- In order to reduce the risk of the root disease *Heterobasidion annosus*, Jeffrey pine, true fir, lodgepole pine, and mountain hemlock stumps greater than 3 inches in diameter within 300 feet of infrastructure, and greater than 14 inches in diameter everywhere else will be treated with sodium tetraborate dechahydrate (commonly known as borax).

  o Stumps will be treated according to manufacturer's specifications.

  o Borax would be applied within 4 hours of stump creation and would not be applied on rainy days or within 300 feet of running water.

  o Exceptions to minimum application distances may be granted only after consultation with a line officer and Forest Service watershed specialist.

- To meet prescriptions for the desired number of clumps in forest restoration treatments, utilize exclusion zones identified by specialists such as no entry zones, to place clumps around these zones.

- Following all hand and mechanized operations, the area will be returned to the state it was in, prior to treatments, within reason.

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Emphasis Areas

<u>Community Wildfire Protection Zone Buffer</u>

The community wildfire protection zone encompasses locations where communities, community assets, and private land could be at a very high risk of damage from wildfire where high fuel loadings exist. There is a general recognition in this zone of surface and ladder fuels being too high, homogenous forest structure, not enough big trees, and all trees experiencing elevated levels of drought stress and mortality. Within this zone, community buffers will be established and used to strategically mitigate vegetation directly adjacent to structures and allow for safer conditions for firefighters.

Treatments within the buffer will intensively remove surface, ladder, and canopy fuels. Surface fuels are highest priority to be targeted as these are necessary to carry fire. They will be removed through piling and burning either by hand or mechanically and/or chipping and removal of fuels, where it will effectively reduce fuels. Ladder fuels will be next for priority to reduce the likelihood of surface fires carrying into the canopy and creating a dangerous, high severity fire. These trees will be cut by hand or mechanically or masticated. Lastly, over-dense canopy fuels combined with high surface fuel loading create conditions for dangerous crown fires that can kill large swaths of trees and make firefighting operations difficult and dangerous. Trees will be thinned, and heterogeneous forest structure will be restored to reduce canopy continuity. Snags or trees that pose a hazard to firefighting operations will also be removed where deemed necessary to protect firefighters and the public. All three fuel categories may be treated with a
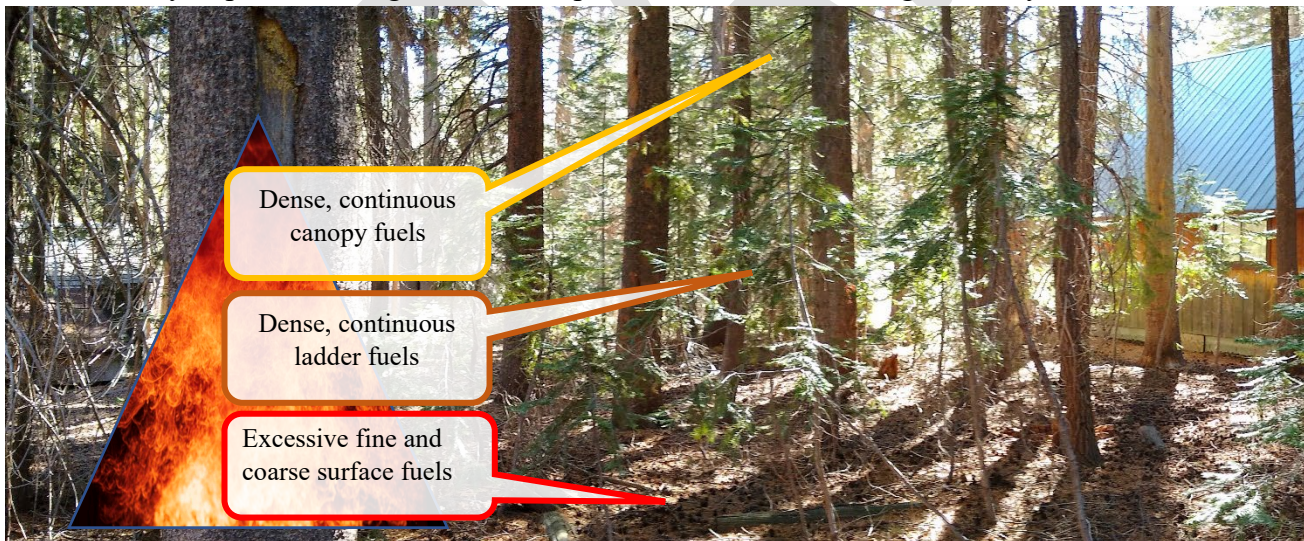

Figure 4 High fuel accumulations surrounding a house within the Community Wildfire Protection Zone Buffer. The priority for fuel treatments is surface, ladder, and then canopy fuels. Photo by: Marc Meyer.

single entry.

Fuel management

- Establish a community buffer with a minimum width of 230 feet from community structures within the zone (LMP 2019; Safford et al. 2012).

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- o Buffer width will be established on a site-by-site basis after survey and modeling efforts.
    - ▪ Larger buffers may be established where more time is needed for firefighting resources to arrive, on steeper terrain, or where the fuel type or forest is conducive to high intensity fire severity.
    - ▪ Smaller buffers may be established close to firefighting resources, on flat terrain, or where the fuel type is conducive to low severity fire effects and low intensity fire.
- o No snags should exist within 2.5 tree lengths of structures and less than 1 large log per acre should exist within 2.5 tree lengths of structures within the buffer (MA-CWPZ-GDL 01).
- o Surface fuel loading should be reduced to less than or equal to 5 tons/acre within the buffer, depending on moisture availability of the site and likelihood of detrimental fire effects.
- o Reduce ladder fuels and living trees which connect surface fuels to the canopy.
- o Remove trees which are dead or dying from insect outbreaks or are infected by pathogens, create an unacceptable risk to life and property, or will in the future within the buffer (MA-CWPZ-DC 01).
- o Create a heterogeneous spatial pattern of openings, individuals, and clumps, but emphasize a larger proportion of openings followed by individual trees over small clumps within the buffer.
    - ▪ Post-treatment forest structure may be more open and less dense than forest outside the community buffer area (MA-CWPZ-DC 01).
- o Prune residual trees to increase average canopy base height, to at least 15 ft within the buffer; prune higher when determined necessary by specialist input (MA-CWPZ-DC 01).
- o Higher fuel loadings may be allowed on a site-specific basis, after consultation with specialists or District Ranger approval.
- Protect remaining large and old Jeffrey pines (typically large diameter, thick, platey, orange bark, large diameter branches, and a flattened top or irregularly shaped crown) or *Juniperus* species, including those with wildlife structures, by removing all trees less than 30 inches in diameter under and within 15 feet of the drip line of the large and old tree(s), which may act as a fuel ladder and represent increased competition for resources (TERR-OLD-GDL 01).
    - o Trees larger than 30 inches but smaller than 40 inches may be removed under the exceptions in TERR-FW-STD 01
- Outside the community buffer, follow actions described for the Ecosystem Type Specifics.

Marten, Raptor, or Other Special Habitat

Maintain denser tree cover in small patches.

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Pumice flats

Establish limiting operating periods where appropriate.

Maintain marten and fisher guidelines where appropriate.

Maintain sensitive riparian areas to avoid damaging sensitive meadow or riparian habitats.

Trees > 20" with existing cavities, dead tops, lightning scars, or structures beneficial to wildlife, and any trees with raptor nests, are considered desirable and should be retained.

Cultural Resource Improvements

Protect or increasing piagi harvest where possible.

More intensive / extensive fuel breaks around heritage sites?

Pinyon pine gathering site improvement. Reduce fire risk, reduce root rot risk, increase tree vigor? Historical densities?

Jeffrey Pine Ecosystem

These forests generally occur in the NE portion of the project area, where soils are shallower and less productive, sometimes interfacing with Sagebrush or Pinyon-Juniper ecotypes. They transition into the Dry Mixed Conifer, Red Fir, and Lodgepole Pine forest types around TOML, moving from the NE to SW. This ecosystem type comprises the majority of the project area and represents the most departed fire regime.

Jeffrey pine forests in the project area currently contain an overabundance of trees; in particular, 12-to-30-inch diameter trees. These trees create fuel conditions for undesirable, high-severity fire effects in the project area and around TOML. However, the larger end of this diameter range presents an opportunity to recruit the next cohort of large trees which will add to and replace the currently small population of pines greater than 30 inches across the Jeffrey pine ecosystem type. Thinning trees on the lower end of the diameter range also releases medium and large diameter trees; residual tree's vigor increases when surrounding trees are cut down and resource availability increases (water and nutrients). Some stands within the project area currently contain large diameter trees which will be retained and targeted for release and increased fire resistance through cutting small trees. Jeffrey pine beetle (*Dendroctonus jeffreyi*) has started to cause mortality in pockets in the project area and tree density reduction would reduce the risk of bark beetle-related mortality. Preliminary field observations measured basal areas twice as high as was historically documented in many of these mortality pockets.
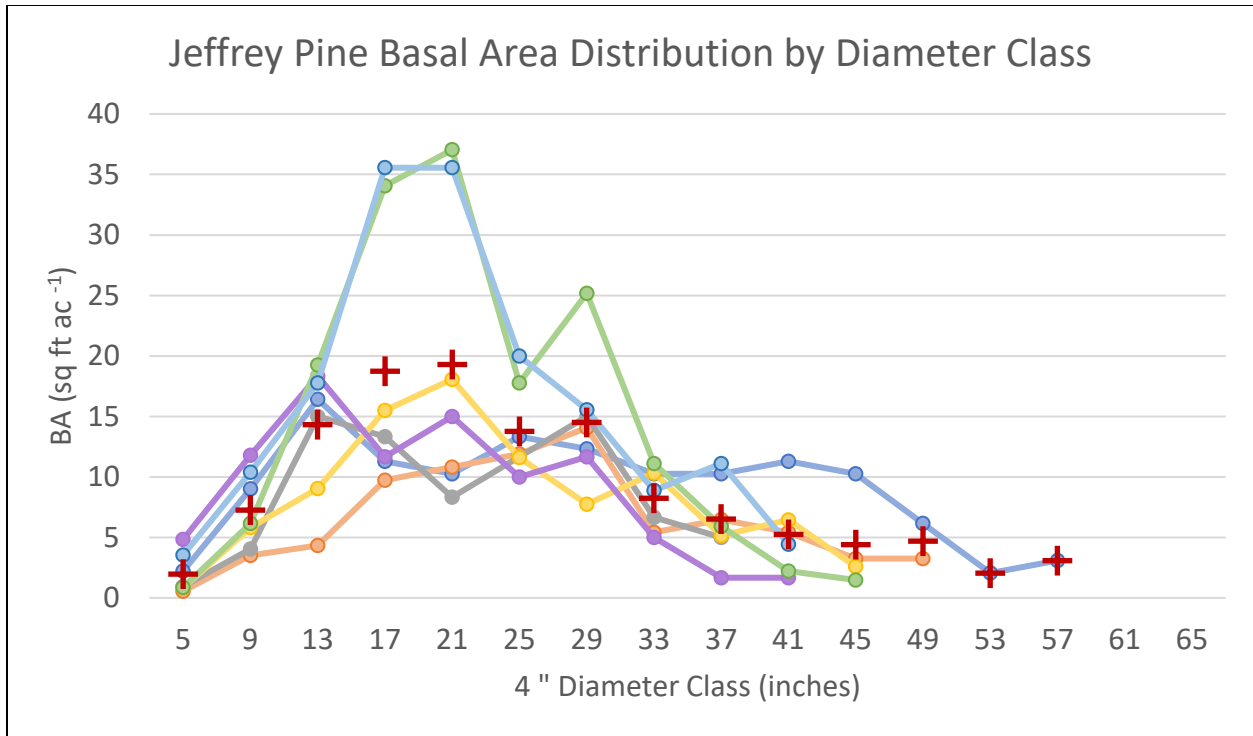
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Figure 5. Distribution of basal area per acre by diameter class for forests identified as Jeffrey Pine ecosystem type. Each line represents common stand exam data for a stand identified as Jeffrey pine, plus signs are stand averages. Most basal area is contained in the diameter classes between 9" and 29". Common stand exam data collected in 2020.

The legacy of past management activities such as fire exclusion and past timber harvest have homogenized forest structure both vertically and horizontally. Continuous fuel profiles are commonly observed within the project area from the ground to the canopies of large and old trees as well as an increasing deficit of clumps and openings areas where canopy bulk densities are low. Species composition has incorporated a larger proportion of fire intolerant and drought intolerant trees, reducing future forest resiliency in the face of climate change and an increasing number of high severity fires.

The goals for treatments in Jeffrey Pine forest type is to promote forest structure and composition that improves the health and vigor of existing Jeffrey pine, improves fire resistance and resilience, and maintains or increases wildlife habitat.

Forest structure

- Size distribution should be shifted towards having the majority of trees in intermediate to large size classes (TERR-OLD-DC Table 4).
    - To increase tree vigor and recruit trees into larger diameter classes that are more fire resistant:
        - Basal area per acre will be reduced to less than 100 ft^2/acre on average but may range at the fine scale across the treatment units from 20 – 200 ft^2/acre (TERR-JEFF-DC 01, 03, 05).

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- Topographic features that support more biomass may exceed 100 ft^2/acre, up to 200 ft^2/acre.
- Stands with 20 or more trees per acre with > 30" dbh may have up to 200 ft^2/acre.
  - Emphasize retaining all trees over 20" where basal area targets can still be met, and operational safety can be maintained.
  - o All cutting of Jeffery Pine will focus on trees smaller than 20" in diameter
- Create irregularly shaped openings in forested stands 0.1 – 1.0 acres in size where residual tree cover is 10% or less (TERR-JEFF-DC 03, 07).
  - o Openings will be created on 10 – 70 percent of the treatment area (TERR-JEFF-DC-07).
  - o These opening can be aligned with existing rock outcrops or patches of grass, shrubs, and seedlings.
- Across no more than 10% of each stand, retain clumps of trees (3 – 12 trees), where stems are within 20' of another tree in the clump (TERR-JEFF-DC 03, 06).
  - o Clumps should be scattered throughout the treatment unit and, to the extent possible, aligned with microsite features that can support the clump.
  - o Trees to be retained in clumps should be healthy and vigorous
  - o Basal area where clumps are present should not exceed 200 ft^2/acre
- Forest between clumps and openings (forest matrix) should be thinned so the majority of crowns are not touching, or tree canopy cover does not exceed 40% (TERR-MONT-DC, Table 2; TERR-JEFF-DC 01, 03, 06).
  - o Individual trees in the forest matrix should be randomly distributed and not evenly spaced (avoid a park-like setting; TERR-JEFF-DC 03).
  - o Forest matrix residual basal area may range between 20 – 100 ft^2/acre
  - o Some residual, individual trees should possess structures that may provide wildlife habitat. Such structures may result from damage from pests, pathogens, fire, lightning, or other natural processes (TERR-JEFF-DC 04; Appendix B for examples).
- Preferentially remove low vigor, small diameter, and / or fire and drought intolerant tree species where possible.
  - o White fir (*Abies concolor*) and lodgepole pine (*Pinus contorta*) are two fire and drought intolerant trees to be preferentially removed.
  - o White fir may be retained where its live crown ratio is greater than 50 percent, DBH is greater than 16 inches, branches support healthy, green needles along a large portion of the branches, and crown form is healthy.

Fuel management

- Protect remaining large and old Jeffrey pines (typically large diameter, thick, platey, orange bark, large diameter branches, and a flattened top or irregularly shaped crown), including those with wildlife architecture, by removing all trees under and within 15 feet of the drip line of the large and old tree(s), which may act as a fuel ladder and represent increased competition for resources (TERR-OLD-GDL 01).

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- o Trees larger than 30 inches but smaller than 40 inches may be removed under the exceptions in TERR-FW-STD 01
- Reduce surface fuel loading to between 1 and 10 tons/ac, including large diameter logs, coarse woody debris, litter and surface fuels (TERR-MONT-DC, Table 3).
  - o Several logs over 15" in diameter and 8' long should be retained per acre.
- Maintain snags 20" in diameter or larger, where they can be safely maintained at 1 – 4 snags per acre (TERR-MONT-DC, Table 3).
  - o Target standing dead trees, less than 20" in diameter, for removal and CWD fuel reduction.
  - o Snag distribution will be irregular across the project area.

Dry Mixed Conifer Ecosystem

The Dry Mixed Conifer ecotype is predominately situated between the Jeffrey Pine and Red Fir forest types where increasing elevation allow for more moisture availability but still represents some limited productivity and frequent fire. This increased moisture also means greater tree diversity such as white fir and lodgepole pine, but still dominated by Jeffrey pine. The Dry Mixed Conifer forest type is primarily north of the TOML and transitions into Red Fir to the west, but also in small pockets around the town.

Some areas, such as along the Mammoth scenic Loop to Inyo Craters and around the Valentine Reserve Ecological Study Area and Lakes Basin, where Dry Mixed Conifer transitions into Lodgepole Pine, tree densities have reached more than double the basal area per acre historically documented in these forests. This has led to insect outbreaks and mass mortality of trees of all sizes. These conditions are also a major risk for high severity wildfire and severely threaten the TOML. A consideration for the regeneration of these forests' composition and structure is required to ensure tree regeneration leads to these forests achieving our Desired Conditions.
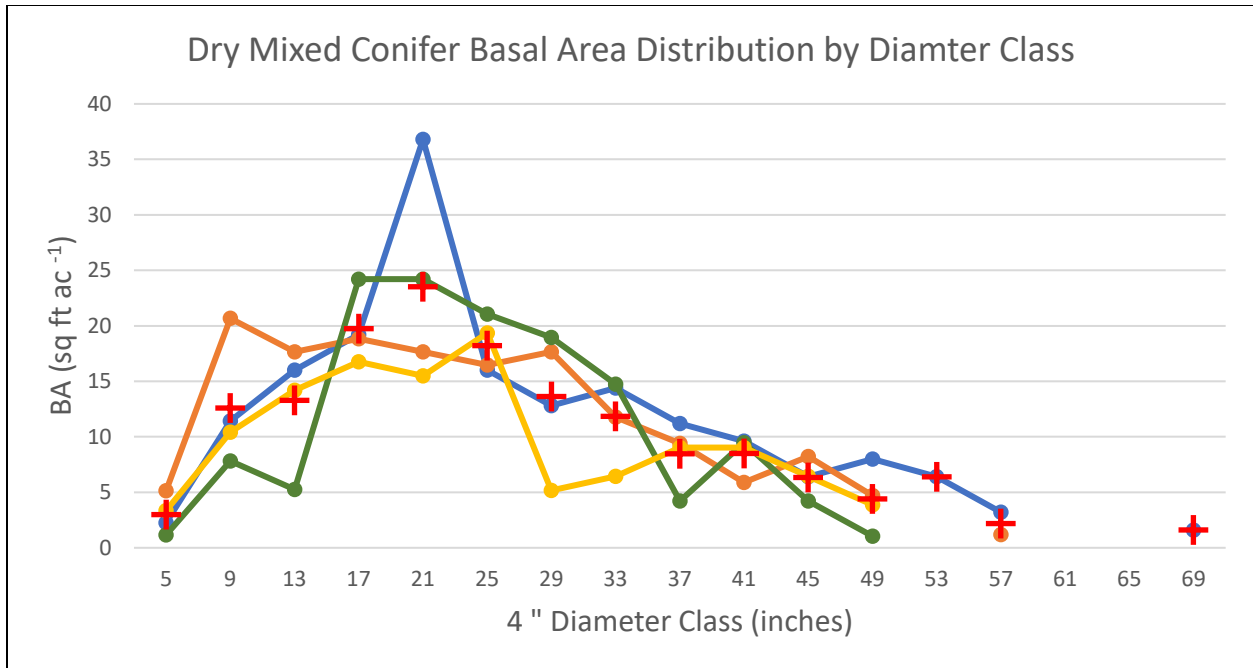
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Figure 6 Distribution of basal area per acre by diameter class for forests identified as Dry Mixed Conifer ecosystem type. Each line represents common stand exam data for a stand identified as Jeffrey pine, plus signs are stand averages. Common stand exam data collected in 2020.

The goal for treatments in the Dry Mixed Conifer forest type is to promote forest structure and composition that improves the health and vigor of existing Jeffrey pine and white pines, and where desirable, white fir and lodgepole pine. Also, to improve fire resistance and resilience, maintains a fire resistant and drought tolerant composition, and maintain or increase wildlife habitat. Basal area at the stand and forest level will vary in order to restore the historical heterogeneity and create structural diversity.

Forest structure

- Size distribution should be shifted towards having the majority of trees in intermediate to large size classes (TERR-OLD-DC Table 4).
    - o To increase tree vigor and recruit trees into larger diameter classes that are more fire resistant:
        - ▪ Basal area per acre will be reduced to less than 125 ft^2/acre on average but may range at the fine scale across the treatment units from 20 – 200 ft^2/acre (TERR-DMC-DC 04).
            - Topographic features that support more biomass may exceed 125 ft^2/acre, up to 200 ft^2/acre.
            - Stands with 20 or more trees per acre with > 30" dbh may have up to 200 ft^2/acre.
        - ▪ Emphasize retaining all trees over 20" where basal area targets can still be met, and operational safety can be maintained.

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- Create irregularly shaped openings in forested stands 0.1 – 0.5 acres in size where all trees less than 30" in diameter are removed and residual tree cover is 10% or less
  - Openings will be created on 10 – 50 percent of the treatment area (TERR-DMC-DC-05).
  - These opening can be aligned with existing rock outcrops or patches of grass, shrubs, and seedlings.
- Across no more than 20% of each stand, retain clumps of trees (3 – 16 trees), where stems are within 20' of another tree in the clump (TERR-DMC-DC 03)
  - Clumps should be scattered throughout the treatment unit and, to the extent possible, aligned with microsite features that can support the clump.
  - Trees to be retained in clumps should be healthy and vigorous
  - Basal area where clumps are present should not exceed 200 ft^2/acre
- Forest between clumps and openings (forest matrix) should be thinned so the majority of crowns are not touching, or tree canopy cover does not exceed 50% (TERR-MONT-DC-01, Table 2 TERR-DMC-DC 03, 04).
  - Individual trees in the forest matrix should be randomly distributed and not evenly spaced (avoid a park-like setting).
  - Forest matrix residual basal area may range between 20 – 125 ft^2/acre
  - Some residual, individual trees should possess structures that may provide wildlife habitat. Such structures may result from damage from pests, pathogens, fire, lightning, or other natural processes (Appendix B for examples).
- Preferentially remove fire and drought-intolerant tree species
  - White fir (*Abies concolor*) and lodgepole pine (*Pinus contorta*) are two fire and drought intolerant trees to be preferentially removed.
  - White fir may be retained where its live crown ratio is greater than 50 percent, DBH is greater than 16 inches, branches support healthy, green needles along a large portion of the branches, and crown form is healthy.

Fuel management

- Protect remaining large and old Jeffrey pines (typically large diameter, thick, platey, orange bark, large diameter branches, and a flattened top or irregularly shaped crown), including those with wildlife architecture, by removing all trees under and within 15 feet of the drip line of the large and old tree(s), which may act as a fuel ladder and represent increased competition for resources (TERR-OLD-GDL 01).
- Reduce surface fuel loading to between 3 and 10 tons/ac, including large diameter logs, coarse woody debris, litter, and surface fuels (TERR-MONT-DC, Table 3).
  - Several logs over 15" in diameter and 8' long should be retained per acre.
- Maintain snags 20" in diameter or larger, where they can be safely maintained at 1 – 4 snags per acre (TERR-MONT-DC, Table 3).
  - Target standing dead trees, less than 20" in diameter, for removal and CWD fuel reduction.
  - Snag distribution will be irregular across the project area.

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Red Fir Ecosystem

The Red fir ecotype is predominately situated on the west and south side of the project area, at higher elevations or where soils are deeper and most productive. These forests occur in the highest productivity class of the project area, receiving substantially more moisture than the lower elevation Dry Mixed Conifer and Jeffrey Pine forest types. This forest type transition into the Dry Mixed Conifer forest types as elevation decreases, moving from the SW to NE. This forest type covers the Mammoth Mountain Ski Area, adjoins the wilderness boundaries, and reaches into the Sherwin Scenic area. It also covers most of the Reds Meadow area and the Minaret road, the main ingress and egress route into the area.

Red fir forests in the project area currently contain a high abundance of trees and support the highest tree diversity. Site conditions usually allow for a greater amount of basal area per acre. However, forests within the project area contain an overabundance of 12-to-30-inch diameter trees which threaten the residual 30" or greater diameter trees not yet killed by insects, drought, or fire. More trees 20 inches and greater in diameter may be removed from red fir stands than from Jeffrey pine or dry mixed conifer stands to meet basal area and structural heterogeneity targets because there is a larger abundance of them and higher moisture availability increases residual tree growth.
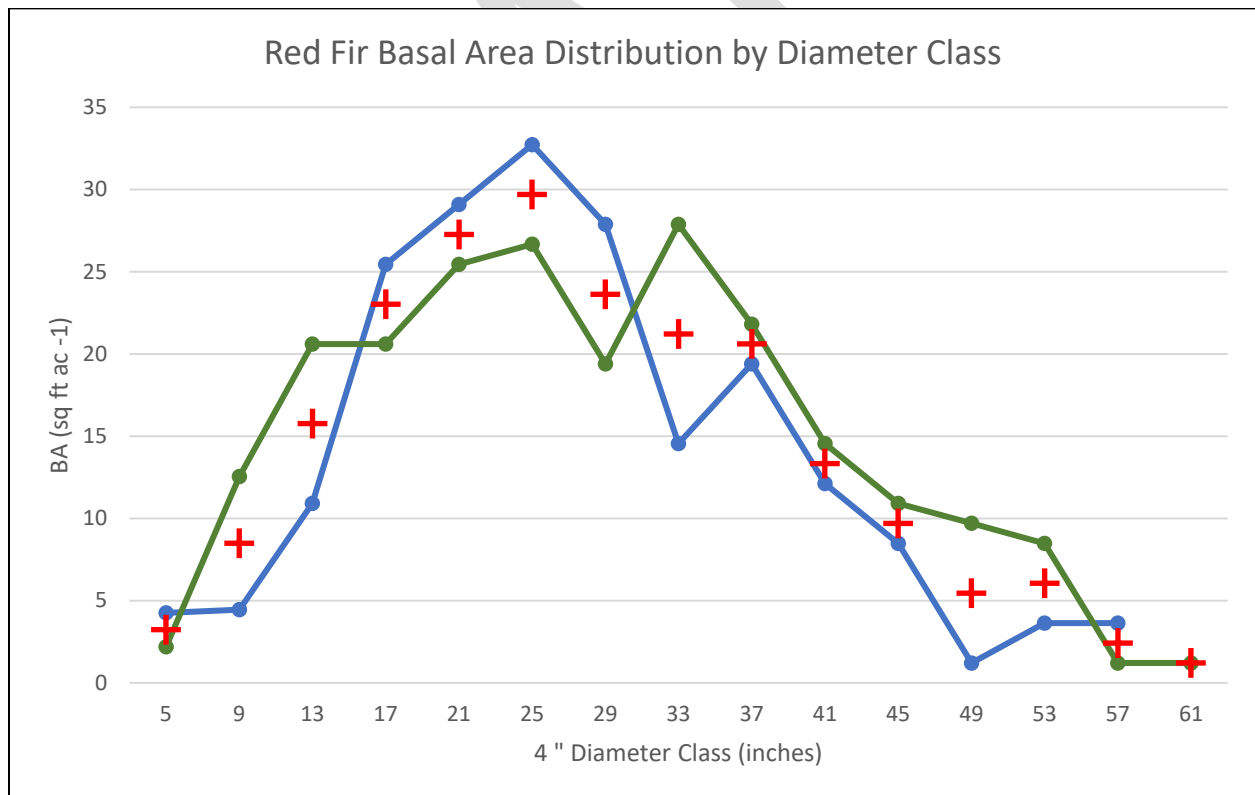

Figure 7 Distribution of basal area per acre by diameter class for forests identified as Red Fir ecosystem type. Each line represents common stand exam data for a stand identified as Red fir; plus signs are stand averages. Common stand exam data collected in 2020.

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The goal for treatments in the Red Fir forest type is to restore forest structure and composition that improves the health and vigor of existing old and pre-settlement trees, improves fire resistance and resilience, and increases or maintains wildlife habitat. Residual live biomass should be located around topographic features that allow sustained higher biomass such as lower slopes, bottoms, and north and east aspects, especially where soils are deeper (TERR-OLD-DC-04).

Forest structure

- Size distribution should be shifted towards having the majority of trees in intermediate to large size classes (TERR-OLD-DC Table 4).
    - To increase tree vigor and recruit trees into larger diameter classes that are more fire resistant:
        - Basal area per acre will be reduced to less than 250 ft^2/acre on average but may range at the fine scale across the treatment units from 50 – 350 ft^2/acre (TERR-RFIR-DC 05).
            - Topographic features that support more biomass may have up to 250 ft^2/acre.
            - Stands with 30 or more trees per acre with > 30" dbh may have up to 350 ft^2/acre.
- Create irregularly shaped openings in forested stands 0.1 – 0.5 acres in size where all trees less than 30" in diameter are removed and residual tree cover is 10% or less.
    - Openings will be created on 5 – 20 percent of the treatment area (TERR-DMC-RFIR-06).
    - These opening can be aligned with existing rock outcrops or patches of grass, shrubs, fungi, and seedlings.
- Across 10 to 40% of each stand, retain clumps of trees (5 – 20 trees), where stems are within 15' of another tree in the clump (TERR-RFIR-DC 05)
    - Clumps should be scattered throughout the treatment unit and, to the extent possible, aligned with microsite features that can support the clump.
    - Trees to be retained in clumps should be healthy and vigorous
    - Basal area where clumps are present should not exceed 350 ft^2/acre
    - Clumps should include a mixture of tree sizes and ages (TERR-RFIR-DC 05).
- Forest between clumps and openings (forest matrix) should be thinned so the majority of crowns are not touching or tree canopy cover does not exceed 40% (TERR-MONT-DC, Table 2).
    - Individual trees in the forest matrix should be randomly distributed and not evenly spaced (avoid a park-like setting).
    - Forest matrix residual basal area may range between 50 – 125 ft^2/acre
    - Some residual, individual trees should possess structures that may provide wildlife habitat. Such structures may result from damage from pests, pathogens, fire, lightning, or other natural processes (TERR-RFIR-DC 04; Appendix B for examples).

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- Protect remaining healthy, mature (>12" dbh) western white pines by removing small and medium diameter conifers up to 30" dbh within the dripline of the western white pine, which may act as a fuel ladder and represent increased competition for resources (TERR-MONT-DC 03).

Fuel management

- Protect remaining large and old Jeffrey pines (typically large diameter, thick, platey, orange bark, large diameter branches, and a flattened top or irregularly shaped crown), including those with wildlife architecture, by removing all trees under and within 15 feet of the drip line of the large and old tree(s), which may act as a fuel ladder and represent increased competition for resources (TERR-OLD-GDL 01).
- Reduce surface fuel loading to between 5 and 20 tons/ac, including large diameter logs, coarse woody debris, litter, and surface fuels (TERR-MONT-DC, Table 3).
- Maintain snags 20" in diameter or larger, where they can be safely maintained at 1 – 4 snags per acre (TERR-MONT-DC, Table 3).
  - Target standing dead trees, less than 20" in diameter, for removal and CWD fuel reduction.
  - Snag distribution will be irregular across the project area.

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Lodgepole Pine (Dry and Mesic) Ecosystem

The Lodgepole Pine forest type occurrence is highly variable across the project area based on topographic position, slope (steepness), soil nutrient and moisture availability and a mixed fire regime. For this project the dry and wet or mesic Lodgepole Pine are combined, as a similar set of management actions will achieve the desired conditions for the range of Lodgepole Pine forest type desired conditions (descriptions of dry and wet lodgepole pine forests can be found on page 30 of the LMP). This forest type typically borders all other forest types, includes a mix of red fir and white pines, and commonly borders montane meadows.
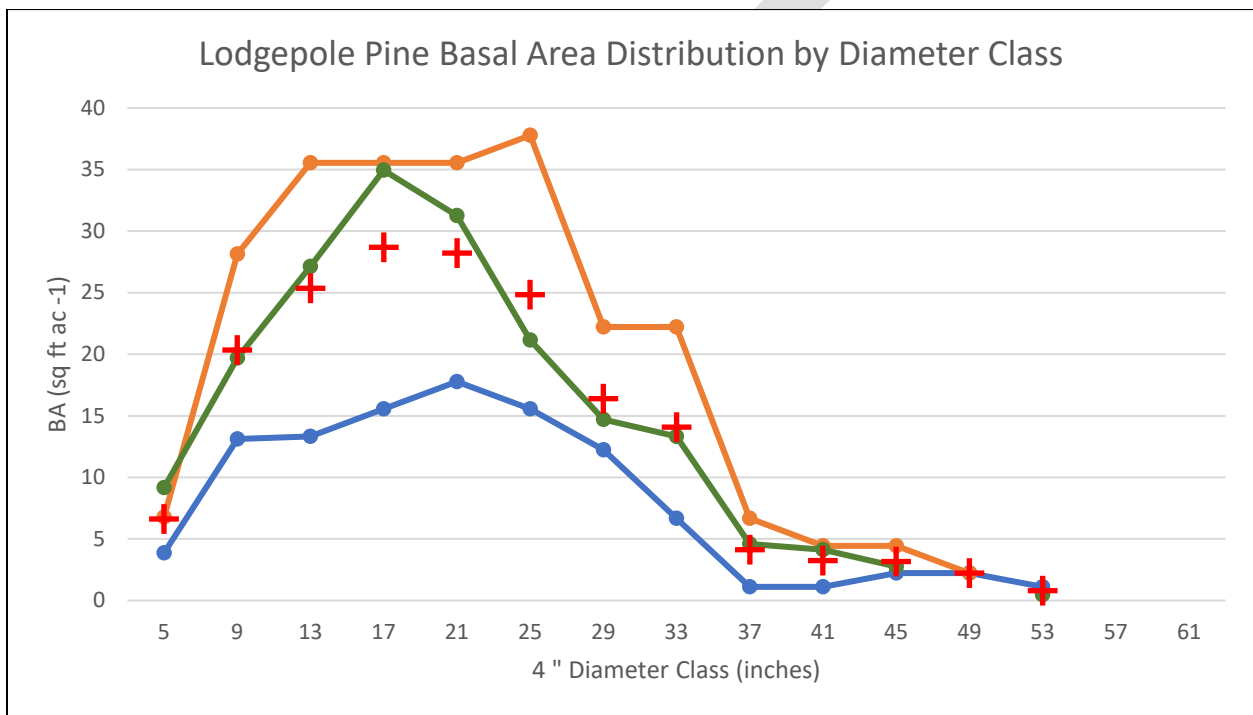

Figure 8 Distribution of basal area per acre by diameter class for forests identified as Lodgepole Pine ecosystem type. Each line represents common stand exam data for a stand identified as Lodgepole pine, plus signs are stand averages. Common stand exam data collected in 2020.

The goal for the Lodgepole Pine forest type is to reduce competition among Lodgepole pine trees to reduce the risk of insect and disease outbreak such as mountain pine beetle or atropilis canker. It is also to reduce fuel loadings to levels which reduce the chance of catastrophic wildfire from carrying continuously through this forest type. Dry lodgepole pine forests typically support lower tree densities and lower levels of surface fuels than wet lodgepole pine forests so fuel reduction activities may be more intense in wetter areas. This will be accomplished through tree and surface fuel removal by mechanical means where local conditions allow, and resource damage can be minimized or by hand labor.

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Forest Structure

- Thin trees to reduce average basal area to < 150 ft^2/acre to reduce inter tree competition.
  - Basal area may range at the fine scale across the treatment units from 50 – 280 ft^2/acre.
    - Stands with 10 or more trees per acre with > 20" dbh may have up to 280 ft^2/acre.
  - A variable density thinning approach will be used to meet spatial heterogeneity requirements (TERR-LDGP-DC 03, 04).
    - Create and expand existing openings generally no greater than ¼ acre in size.
    - Create conditions for healthy, vigorous mid and understory trees to emerge.
    - Maintain groups of large and intermediately sized trees where canopy closure is above 50%.
    - Openings and clumps are randomly distributed and irregular in size and shape.
    - Emphasize species diversity by focusing removal on Lodgepole pine and in dry sites, fir species.
- A tiered system for selecting trees for removal to meet basal area target:
  1. Start with removal of trees 8" – 12" in diameter and below to meet basal area target.
     a. The upper diameter limit between 8" and 12" should be decided for the implementation unit to appropriately target structure and age classes.
     b. This will reduce the majority of ladder fuels and are in the age class that are crowding older trees.
  2. Next remove trees up to 20" that are in the Acceptable or Non-Desirable category or are crowding the larger dominant trees and are within 15' of their dripline.
  3. Lastly selectively remove trees over 20" if necessary, that are in the Acceptable or Non-Desirable category or are crowding the larger dominant trees and are within 15' of their dripline.
- Protect remaining healthy, mature (>12" dbh) white pines by removing small and medium diameter conifers up to 30" dbh within the dripline of the western white pine, which may act as a fuel ladder and represent increased competition for resources (TERR-MONT-DC 03).

Fuel Management

- Protect remaining large and old conifers, including those with wildlife architecture, by removing all trees under and within 15 feet of the drip line of the large and old tree(s), which may act as a ladder fuel and represent increased competition for resources (TERR-OLD-GDL 01).
- Reduce surface fuel loading to between 2 and 20 tons/ac, including coarse woody debris, litter, and surface fuels (TERR-MONT-DC, Table 3).
  - Remaining surface fuel distribution should be patchy

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- Maintain 20" and larger diameter snags where they can be safely maintained at 1 – 4 snags per acre.
    - Remove small diameter standing dead trees, less than 20"
    - Snag distribution will be irregular across the project area

Riparian / Aspen Ecosystems

The life cycle of aspen is closely linked to fire, where higher intensity fire is needed to consume the bulk of the canopy to trigger hormonal suckering response and regenerate stands through aspen seedling establishment. This cycle has been interrupted by fire suppression allowing an overabundance of large hazardous fuels and conifer encroachment that has detrimentally impacted the health of aspen stands and lowered their fire resilience.

The goal of these treatments is to restore aspen stand composition and structure, and riparian function. In the project area the aspen ecosystem type typically dominates the vegetation along riparian areas and as such these management activities are focused on aspen. However, increasing recruitment of hardwoods or other riparian plant species such as willow and alder, as well as increase the cover and diversity of understory shrubs and herbaceous plants is a desired outcome of these treatments.

- Encroaching conifers will be removed from aspen stands up to one and a half times the average height of aspen trees in the stand; distance required to prevent remaining adjacent conifers from shading the aspen stand; or up to 100 feet, whichever is greater. Trees not suppressing aspen regeneration (i.e. shading), or representing limited species presence may be retained such as Sierra juniper (TERR-ASPN-DC 02 and TERR-ASPN-GDL 04).
    - Slash piles for burning would be kept at least 15 feet away from large aspen trees to limit damage to aspen trunks. Larger piles (more than 10 feet pile width) should be farther from aspen trunks than smaller piles (TERR-ASPN-GDL 01).
- Where excessive densities of snags exist that would contribute to an increased fire risk or would directly impact aspen regeneration and mature trees from snag-fall, remove standing dead aspen and conifers within aspen stands.
- Reduce surface fuel loading (typically coarse woody debris of small to large diameters) to less than 10 tons/ac.
- In areas with fens, springs, and other sources of groundwater, only hand work will occur and in coordination with a Forest Service watershed specialist (MA-RCA-STD 09). Additional resource protection measures may be implemented such as hand carrying wood or directional falling after consultation with the specialist.
- Aspen with evidence of cultural markings or of any cultural significance should be flagged for avoidance and an operation-limiting buffer should be established around these trees to prevent damage (TERR-ASPN-GDL 02).

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Meadow Ecosystem

The goal of these treatments is to restore meadow hydrology and functionality through the removal of encroaching conifers, restoration of headcuts, and bank stabilization (as suggested in the 2019 land management plan, p. 145, Aquatic and Riparian Ecosystems proposed and possible actions).

- Live conifers less than 30 inches in diameter will be considered for removal (RCA-MEAD-DC 07).
  - Larger trees, up to 40 inches, can be felled or girdled if they are a seed source and their removal would benefit meadow restoration (TERR-FW-STD 01(b)).
- Generally, conifers growing on upland features such as slightly elevated landforms which do not exhibit features of a meadow will be retained.
  - Features which qualify may include slightly elevated landforms which support vigorous conifer growth and appear to be persistent on the landscape. These may take the form of elevated tree 'islands' or 'stringers' or abrupt meadow edges with a substantial change in understory vegetation.
- Conifers will only be removed where operations will not irreparably damage meadow hydrologic, soil, and vegetative function and structure. Soil and vegetation protection measures will be used for removal of larger trees such as hand carrying or hauling over-snow.
- Residual slash from conifers may be: piled and burned a minimum of 25' from any meadow or watercourse, chipped so that chips are removed or blown away from the meadow, lopped and scattered, or removed from site.
  - Up to 5 – 10 trees per acre over 16 inches in diameter at breast height (DBH) may be felled and lopped and scattered within meadows.
  - Trees will be bucked and limbed so the boles lie flush with the meadow to promote decomposition.
- Downed woody material will not occupy more than 1% of the meadow surface as a result of conifer removal activity.
- A limiting operating period will be in place during critical lifecycle times for Yosemite toad and yellow-legged frog after consultation with a Forest Service biologist.

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Sagebrush and Sagebrush-Jeffrey Pine Interface

- Remove encroaching conifers up to 30" to improve habitat and habitat connectivity for sage grouse (TERR-SAGE-DC 04).
- Mow shrubs where the risk of fire would pose a danger to people, infrastructure, and inhibit safe egress.
    - Mowing would be completed by machinery where operability is suitable such as slopes less than 30 percent or areas with limited rocks and boulders.
    - Otherwise, hand removal of shrubs through chainsaws or hand tools will be permitted.
- Leave clumps of shrubs within area to be mowed in irregular patterns.
- Retain a diversity of shrub and ground cover species of different sizes, age and growth habit.
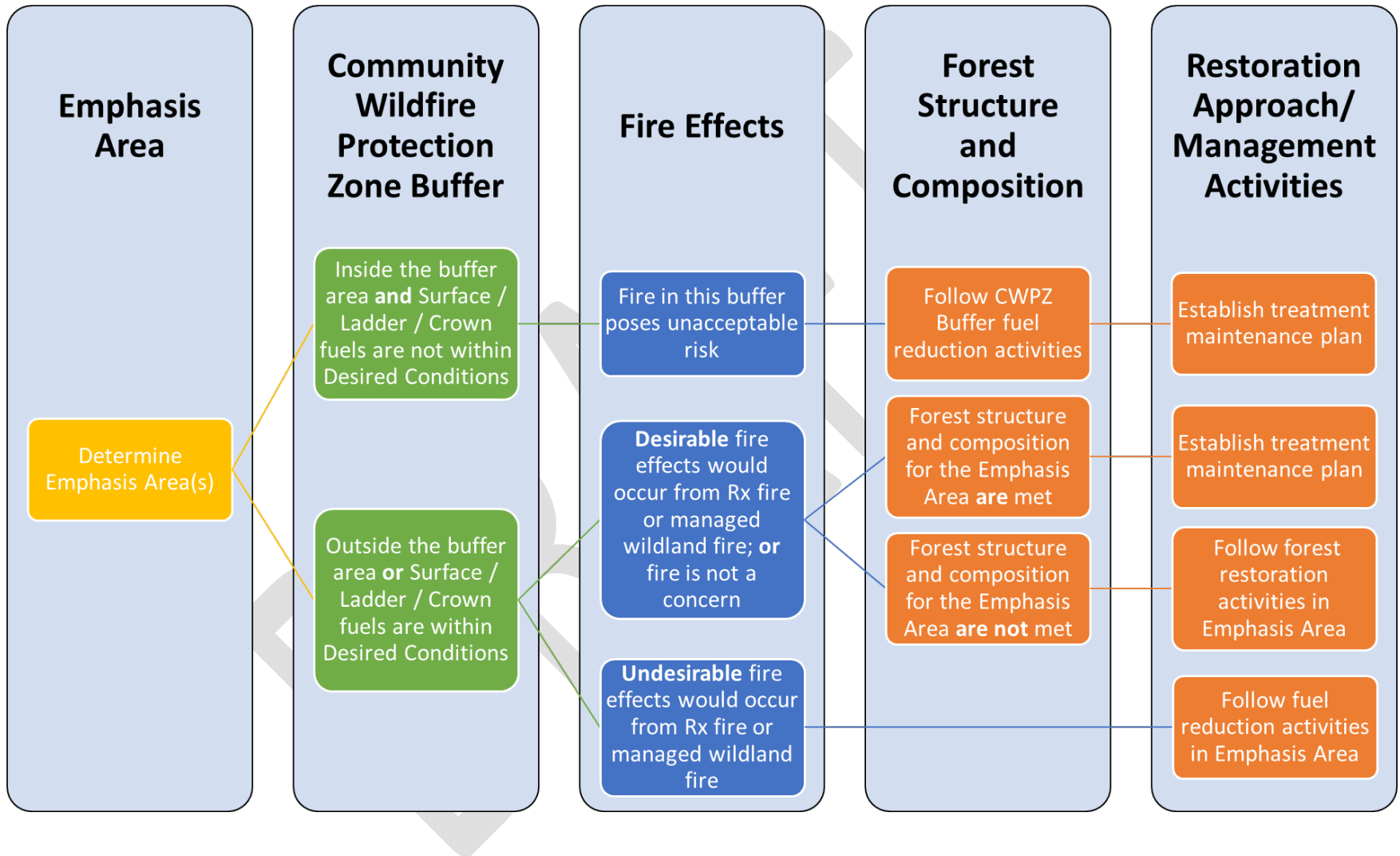
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Decision Matrix

The decision matrix will aid planners in implementing these proposed actions on the ground. This is necessary because across the project area's 55,000 acres requiring treatment, forest conditions, even within an emphasis area, can vary in the required intensity and extent of treatment. Additionally, restoration objectives such as landscape-level heterogeneity are most effectively achieved through fine scale prescriptions. Through varying stocking regimes, species composition, and forest structural elements, one stand at a time, a landscape will develop sustained complexity between active management entries (GTR 270). When land is identified for implementation, the forester or other lead specialist should make several determinations in order to use this decision matrix / implementation plan:

- Strategic Fire Management Zone
- Proximity to communities
- Accessibility
- Ecotype
- Landscape position
- Current conditions
- History of fire and forest management
- Proximity to past treatments

This chart represents the rationale for implementing treatments based on the risk of fire and departure from the desired conditions outlined in the Land Management Plan. The Emphasis Area groups the ground into similar treatment types based on their forest type, dominant vegetation, or specific desired conditions for animals or plants. Project acres within the Community Wildfire Protection Zone Buffer or other specific concerns such as evacuation routes will receive more specific, intensive treatment to reduce the risk to life and property and improve firefighting operations. Treatments are structured to and to restore forest structure and composition, and reduce undesirable fire effects.

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Decision Space / Matrix for implementing the proposed actions

Emphasis Area	Community Wildfire Protection Zone Buffer	Fire Effects	Forest Structure and Composition	Restoration Approach/ Management Activities

Emphasis Area: Determine Emphasis Area(s)

Community Wildfire Protection Zone Buffer:
- Inside the buffer area **and** Surface / Ladder / Crown fuels are not within Desired Conditions
- Outside the buffer area **or** Surface / Ladder / Crown fuels are within Desired Conditions

Fire Effects:
- Fire in this buffer poses unacceptable risk
- **Desirable** fire effects would occur from Rx fire or managed wildland fire; **or** fire is not a concern
- **Undesirable** fire effects would occur from Rx fire or managed wildland fire

Forest Structure and Composition:
- Follow CWPZ Buffer fuel reduction activities
- Forest structure and composition for the Emphasis Area **are** met
- Forest structure and composition for the Emphasis Area **are not** met

Restoration Approach/ Management Activities:
- Establish treatment maintenance plan
- Establish treatment maintenance plan
- Follow forest restoration activities in Emphasis Area
- Follow fuel reduction activities in Emphasis Area

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Appendices

Appendix A – Plan Components

The Inyo National Forest Land Management Plan (2019) has set forth desired conditions, guidelines, standards, and potential management approaches for the emphasis areas outlined in this document. Those plan components are reflected in the proposed actions to ensure consistency with the LMP. Relevant plan components for each emphasis area are listed in the table below.

Emphasis Area	LMP Desired Conditions and Objectives	Other LMP components
Community Wildfire Protection Zone Buffer	MA-CWPZ-DC 01	MA-CWPZ-GOAL 01, 02 MA-CWPZ-GDL 01
Marten, Raptor, or Other Special Habitat	TERR-OLD-DC 02 TERR-SH-DC 01, 02, 03	
Cultural Resource Improvements	TERR-FW-OBJ 03 TERR-FW-DC 11 TERR-PINY DC 05	
Jeffrey Pine Ecosystem	TERR-JEFF-DC 01, 03, 04, 05, 07 TERR-MONT-DC 01, 02, 03 Tables 1-4 TERR-OLD-DC 01, 04, 05, 06, 07	
Dry Mixed Conifer Ecosystem	TERR-DMC-DC 01, 03, 04, 05, 06 TERR-MONT-DC 01, 02, 03 Tables 1-4 TERR-OLD-DC 01, 04, 05, 06, 07	
Red Fir Ecosystem	TERR-RFIR-DC 01, 03, 04, 05, 06, 07 TERR-MONT-DC 01, 02, 03 Tables 1-4 TERR-OLD-DC 01, 04, 05, 06, 07	
Lodgepole Pine (Dry and Mesic) Ecosystem	TERR-LDGP-DC 01, 03, 04, 05, 06, 07, 08, 10 TERR-MONT-DC 01, 02, 03 Tables 1-4 TERR-OLD-DC 01, 04, 05, 06, 07	

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Sagebrush and Sagebrush-Jeffrey Pine Interface Ecosystem	TERR-SAGE-DC 04 SPEC-SG-DC 01, 05, 07	SPEC-SG-STD 01, 06, 07
Riparian / Aspen Ecosystems	TERR-ASPN-DC 01, 02, 03 MA-RCA-DC 08 RCA-RIV-DC 06	TERR-ASPN-GDL 01, 02, 03, 04 MA-RCA-STD 02, 09 MA-RCA-GDL 02
Meadow Ecosystem	RCA-MEAD-DC 01, 07, 08	MA-RCA-STD 09
Landscape Considerations		
Terrestrial Ecosystems	TERR-FW-DC 01 – 07, 09 - 11 TERR-FW-OBJ 01 TERR-MONT-DC 01 - 03	TERR-FW-STD 01 TERR-FW-GDL 01, 02 TERR-OLD-GDL 01 TERR-FW PMA's
Fire Management	FIRE-FW-DC 03	FIRE-FW GOAL 01, 03, 05, 07, 08, 10 MA-CWPZ-GDL 01, 02
Animal and Plant Species Invasive Species	SPEC-FW-DC SPEC-SG-OBJ 01 SPEC-SMPF-DC 01, 02	SPEC-FW-STD-01, 02, 03 INV-FW-STD-03 INV-FW-GDL-01
Conservation Watershed	MA-CW-DC 02 MA-CW-OBJ 01	MA-CW PMA's
Timber Planning and Suitability	TIMB-FW-DC 01, 02 TIMB-FW-OBJ 01	TIMB-FW-GDL 01-03 TIMB-FW PMA's
Community Engagement	LOC-FW-DC 01, 02, 04, 05	LOC-FW-GOAL 02

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Appendix B – Individuals, Clumps, and Openings

Individuals, clumps, and openings is a description of a forest structural composition and a management approach to restoring forest heterogeneity in dry forest ecosystems where fire was a frequent occurrence.

The abundance of each of these components is not derived specifically from the pattern but should be guided by moisture availability and carrying capacity of each forest. For example, valley bottoms and low slopes are likely to contain greater moisture availability and so could contain a higher abundance of trees (TERR-FW-GDL 01, TERR-OLD-DC 04). The higher end of a basal area target is to allow for the presence of many large diameter trees.

Figure B-1 – A Jeffrey pine ecosystem type displaying desired spatial pattern and heterogeneity. On the left a clump of Jeffrey pines with little surrounding vegetation or ladder fuels. Right of center an individual tree is growing in full sun with only two small trees nearby which may end up as a clump in the future. On the right an opening in full sun allows small Jeffrey pine regeneration. Photo by: Marc Meyer

Figure B-2 – A red fir ecosystem type displaying desired spatial pattern and heterogeneity. There is a higher stem density here but mostly composed of large diameter trees. A higher proportion of clumps exist and are composed of pine and fir tree species but still maintain space between them where regeneration can grow with few individuals. Snags and other structures exist that are beneficial for wildlife habitat. Photo by: Marc Meyer
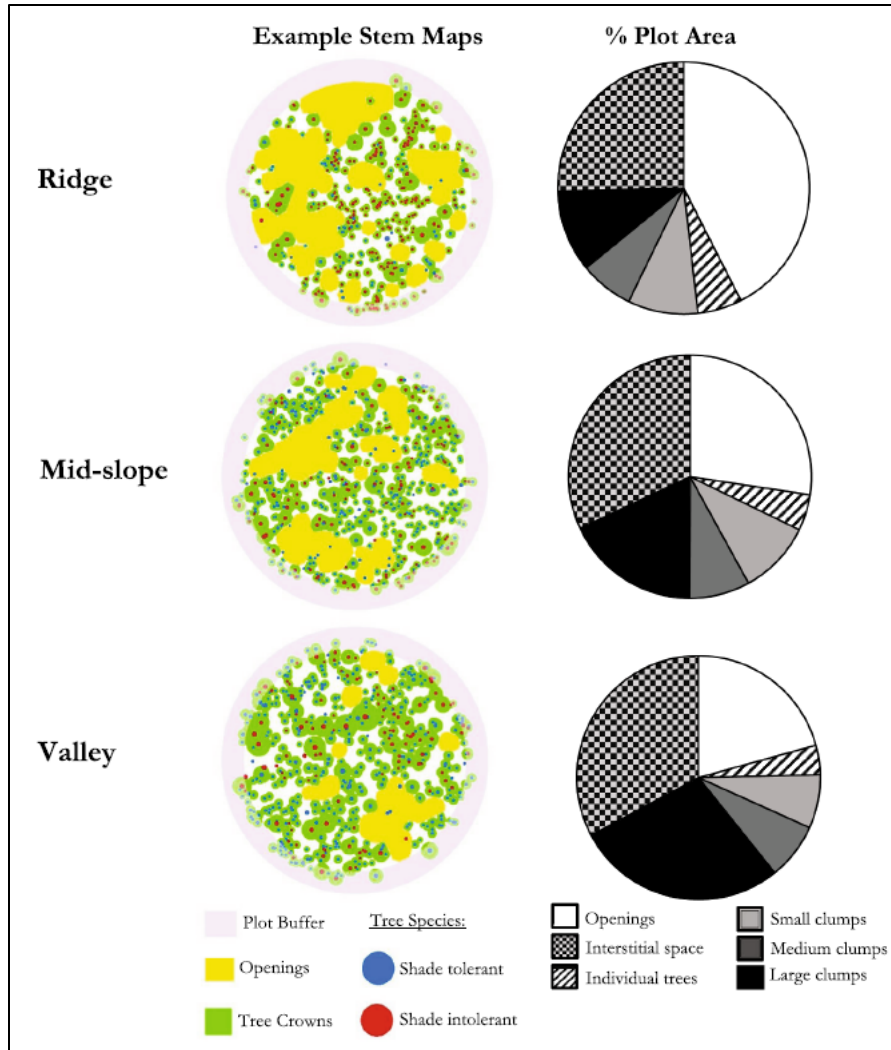
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Figure B-3 – A diagrammatic representation of forest structure and species composition according to landscape position. Ridges tend to have little available moisture while mid-slopes have more available moisture and valleys have the most. The increase of shade intolerant trees also indicates a longer fire return interval allowing these trees to survive to maturity. Graphic from:

Ng, Jan, et al. "Topographic variation in tree group and gap structure in Sierra Nevada mixed-conifer forests with active fire regimes." Forest Ecology and Management 472 (2020): 118220.

Appendix C – Forest Structures Beneficial to Wildlife

Pictures and descriptions are from:

Walsh, D. and M. North. 2012. Appendix: Examples of forest structures that may provide wildlife habitat. Pages 177-184 in M. North (ed.) Managing Sierra Nevada Forests, General Technical Report PSW-GTR-237. USDA Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Research Station, Albany, CA. 184 pp.

Figure C-1—Live tree with hollow structure. The tree has an old dead top with cavity nests and a new healthy top leader grown up alongside, providing some shelter. The tree is healthy overall with a high live crown ratio and no ladder fuel concern.

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Figure C-2—Live tree with decay. The tree has a potential platform nest site that is somewhat protected by adjacent trees. This site could be used for nesting or could break and provide a platform for nests or for roosting.

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Appendix D – Desirable, Acceptable, Undesirable Trees

These are physical characteristics to consider when selecting trees to retain. The emphasis on Desirable trees for retention is to ensure healthy and vigorous trees are recruited into larger size classes and that these trees are most likely to survive increasing drought, fire, and bark beetle stressors. However, Acceptable and Non-Desirable trees play an important role in the ecosystem and will not be completely removed.

Evaluation Criteria	Desirable	Acceptable	Non-Desirable
Live Crown Ratio	>40% for Jeffrey pine >50% for other species	25 – 40% for Jeffrey pine 35 – 50% for other species	<25% for Jeffrey pine <35% for other species
Crown Class	Dominant or Co-dominant	Intermediate	Suppressed or Overtopped
Form Defects	NONE	MINOR – (no significant weakening or toppling of the tree anticipated resulting from crooks, sweeps, or tight forks etc.)	MAJOR – (significant weakening or toppling of tree anticipated; severe sweeps, crooks, or forks in lower 2/3 of tree)
Hawksworth Dwarf Mistletoe Rating (DMR)	NONE	Jeffrey pine – DMR < 3 Other species – DMR < 2	Jeffrey pine – DMR > 3 Other species – DMR > 2 Trees < 6" dbh with any signs of dwarf mistletoe infection Trees < 6" dbh immediately adjacent to DMR > 3 trees
Damaging Agents	NONE	Bark missing from < 50% of tree bole circumference Some evidence of bark beetle activity along tree bole; tree appears healthy Fire kill of cambium on < 50% of bole circumference or crown scorch on the lower 2/3 of tree crown	Bark missing from > 50% of tree bole circumference Bark beetle activity along majority of tree bole Fire kill of cambium on > 50% of bole circumference or crown scorch on the lower 3/4 of tree crown

Wildlife Trees – Trees > 20" with existing cavities, dead tops, lightning scars, or structures beneficial to wildlife, and any trees with raptor nests, are considered desirable and should be retained.

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STAFF REPORT

To: ESCOG Joint Powers Authority

From: Elaine Kabala, ESCOG Staff

Subject: United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Sustainable Economic and Community Development (SEDC) Program

Meeting date: February 4, 2022

Prepared on: January 25, 2022

Attachments: A) USDA SEDC Application Project Narrative

BACKGROUND/HISTORY:

Quantified Ventures, in partnership with the Sustainable Recreation Tourism Initiative, has identified potential funding for capacity building for the ESCOG through the USDA SECD to support collaboration with the Inyo National Forest towards campground improvements throughout the Eastern Sierra.

SECD supports projects that promote and implement strategic community investment plans, and prioritizes projects that are carried out in a rural area and support a multi-jurisdictional and multi-sectoral strategic community investment plan. SECD is focused specifically on assisting rural areas who have a vision for how to invest in their community and grow economically, but lack the funds to implement their vision. SECD helps bridge this gap by providing project-level funding for projects that align with the region's strategic vision.

Quantified Ventures will prepare and submit the application on behalf of the ESCOG. The project team is requesting ~$150,000 in capacity funding for the ESCOG, so that the ESCOG has the capability to help advance the mission of the Sustainable Recreation Tourism Initiative.

BUDGET IMPACTS:

None.

LEGAL REVIEW:
ESCOG Counsel Grace Chuchla has reviewed this item and found that it complies with the law.

RECOMMENDATION:
Staff requests the Board discuss the USDA SEDC proposal and provide direction to Staff to submit an application for USDA SEDC funding.

ESCOG SECD Application Project Narrative
January 2022

PLAN Summary

Title: Fostering Regional Collaboration in the Eastern Sierra to Solve Issues of Mutual Concern

Across the country, land managers such as the United States Forest Service (USFS) are facing increasing strain from the impacts of overuse and climate change. However, due to flat or declining budgets, land managers have neither the resources to properly mitigate climate impacts nor to strategically capitalize on increased visitation. Instead, land managers become locked in a pattern of deferred maintenance and siloed decision-making. The impacts of this cycle reverberate beyond forests' boundaries, as the economic conditions of gateway communities are typically highly dependent on the vitality of the adjacent public lands. When land managers are only able to fund necessary maintenance rather than investing in projects of strategic importance, opportunities for gateway communities to benefit from public lands are diminished.

With economic development efforts in rural communities fragmented across multiple programs and departments, bridging the disconnect between land managers and local communities requires a collaborative and collective approach. This requires changing the way we fund projects and the types of agencies that are considered in the outdoor recreation economy ecosystem. At the federal and state level, there is a need to connect public works, public health, and economic development agencies, while at the local level there is a need to provide innovative financial solutions for strategic investments to support budget- and capacity-constrained local governments that need it most.

The dynamic described above, where land managers have become locked in a pattern of deferred maintenance and capacity shortfalls, is evident in the region surrounding the Inyo National Forest. Inyo, Mono, and Alpine Counties combine for ~35,000 residents, but the region welcomes 5M+ recreation visitors per year. The manner in which that visitation is managed is existential to these rural communities. Currently, local recreation infrastructure is not designed for current demand nor is it sufficiently resilient to the negative impacts of climate change. To address these challenges, sites and access on the Inyo National Forest must be redesigned, enhanced, and expanded to meet current and projected demand and to adapt to future climate conditions. These improvements will require an investment of $20M-$36M and would allow the region to better distribute and absorb visitation, sustain natural resources, and enhance economic growth and stability for adjacent gateway communities.

However, the objectives of the Plan extend beyond just the immediate campground needs identified above. The project team believes the successful execution of this project would demonstrate the benefits of regional collaboration among rural communities. These objectives include:

1. **Jointly Funded:** Bringing more stakeholders together to jointly fund a project increases the likelihood of funding the project upfront, rather than incrementally, and drawing on the different resources available to different stakeholders.
2. **Jointly Managed**: Joint management of the project will ensure all stakeholder needs are met and allow all stakeholders to feel confident about the use of contributed funds.
3. **Replicable**: Funding for the Inyo NF campground improvements should provide a replicable model that can sustainably address future needs for hard infrastructure of any type, on the Inyo and on other national forests, as well as on lands managed by other federal agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and even potentially on non-federally managed lands such as gateway counties.

PROJECT Summary

The Eastern Sierra Council of Governments (ESCOG) is emblematic of the region's need for collaboration. The ESCOG was originally formed in 1995 under a Joint Powers Agreement, but was reorganized as a Joint Powers Authority (JPA) in January 2020 in order to have more power to implement the projects it prioritized. The ESCOG JPA has been a key partner in this innovative, nationally directed, multi-jurisdictional and multi-partnered effort to finance capital improvements to recreation infrastructure in the Eastern Sierra to date. However, the ESCOG JPA lacks any independent source of revenue and is requesting funding to provide critical technical assistance to support this Plan.

With the Plan's estimated range of costs for improvements between $20 million and $36 million, the project's need is to ensure that the ESCOG JPA has the necessary resources to successfully engage and represent regional interests in the financing effort. This capacity funding would also be critical for ensuring that the ESCOG JPA is able to support long-term regional efforts. Below are some examples of actions the ESCOG JPA could provide if it has appropriate capacity funding:

1. Provide independent analysis of a variety of potentially complex financing scenarios to ESCOG JPA members and the ESSRP, including appropriate counsel to provide financial advice on instruments such as bond financing;
2. Produce conceptual renderings that translate the GAOA-funded Inyo NF engineering work into graphic representations of the infrastructure to be built for engagement with infrastructure beneficiaries, which will include public utilities, federal and state agencies, the private sector and local jurisdictions; and,
3. Coordinate, convene and facilitate the partnered effort, including outreach and engagement with beneficiaries.

Through the planning and implementation of capital improvements to regional campgrounds, the ESCOG JPA and the project will be constructively engaged with multiple components of the identified nexus through the following: construction of climate-resilient and watershed-sensitive campgrounds as recommended by the Proposition 68–funded SRTI climate adaptation and resilience assessment, "A Changing Climate: Vulnerability in California's Eastern Sierra"; increases to campground visitation equating to increases in sales tax revenue, hotel occupancy tax revenue, jobs created and the proportion of new hires from local communities; and social benefits from increased visitation, including reduced overcrowding, reduction in trash and human waste on the watershed, reduction of fire risk and increased diversity of the Eastern Sierra visitor profile.

The estimated Project cost to support the ESCOG JPA is $165,000.

Objectives

Below are objectives that we can potentially use for our application. In the scoring section, the application states that it will be evaluated on whether "The Plan contains clear objectives with performance measures, action steps for implementation and methods to track progress toward achieving the Plan's objectives".

1. **Regional Collaboration:** A key metric of success for this Plan is ensuring that investments into the recreation economy are jointly funded, jointly managed, and replicable in the future. Capacity funding for the ESCOG will be critical for that effort, because it will enable the ESCOG to bring various funding sources together that regional entities couldn't pursue on their own, would provide a forum for regional stakeholders to manage and implement priorities, and would endure to help address future issues of mutual concern.

2. **Economic & Social Benefits:** This Plan seeks to preserve the economic vitality of the region by combating identified risks to campground visitation / revenue, boost local tax revenues, reduce waste, and increase the diversity profile of recreational visitors. The ESCOG can support these objectives by bringing together the entities who help manage these lands (USFS, BLM, NPS) and the communities who rely on those lands and can provide material support (Inyo, Mono, Alpine Counties).

3. **Environmental Benefits**: The Plan would help reduce fire risk and mitigate other ecological challenges exacerbated by climate change such as erosion. Our partners, including the Eastern Sierra Sustainable Recreation Partnership (ESSRP) and Mammoth Lakes Trails and Public Access Foundation (MLTPA) received funding for the Sustainable Recreation & Tourism Initiative (SRTI) to produce a climate adaptation and resilience assessment, "A Changing Climate: Vulnerability in California's Eastern Sierra". This report is a critical piece of our Plan but had to be administered by the Town of Mammoth Lakes because the ESCOG JPA had not yet been formalized. This funding would provide the capacity necessary to ensure the ESCOG could play a fundamental role in implementing climate adaption and resilience measures in the future.

STAFF REPORT

To: ESCOG Joint Powers Authority

From: Elaine Kabala, ESCOG Staff

Subject: Citizens Wildfire Academy

Meeting date: February 4, 2022

Prepared on: January 25, 2022

Attachments: None

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BACKGROUND/HISTORY:
The Citizens Wildfire Academy (CWA) CWA is intended to increase overall citizen awareness of wildfire in the Eastern Sierra and California, and to enable residents to engage in preparation and prevention activities. The CWA is envisioned to raise wildfire awareness throughout the Eastern Sierra region, and will consist of five sessions led by experts over a five-month period, focusing on the following topic:

- Introduction and the history of wildfires in the Eastern Sierra and California
- Fire ecology
- USFS, BLM, CalFire roles, plans, and policies regarding wildfires
- Resident home hardening, defensible space, and other preparation information
- Fire insurance concerns and other issues.

The sessions would run 60-90 minutes and be provided via Zoom through Mono County or another platform. If possible, we may do some of them in person as well. There would be time built in for questions.

BUDGET IMPACTS:
None. Future funding may be available through fire prevention grants.

LEGAL REVIEW:
ESCOG Counsel Grace Chuchla has reviewed this item and found that it complies with the law.

<u>RECOMMENDATION</u>:

Staff requests the Board discuss and provide direction to support coordination and outreach for the CWA.